**ROGER MARTIN DU GARD**

# The Thibaults

**Arthur Stuart Ahluwalia Stronge Gilbert**

*Note: As regards Parts I and II of The Thibaults the present Translator wishes to acknowledge the assistance he has derived from the previous version by Mr. Stephen Haden Guest.*

*I dédicate*
*THE THIBAULTS*
*to the fraternal memory of*
*PIERRE MARGARITIS*
*whose death in the military hospital on 30 October 1918 destroyed the powerful work that's maturing in his tormented and pure heart.*

# PART I
# THE GREY NOTEBOOK
# I

AS THEY reached the school-buildings at the corner of the Rue de Vaugirard, M. Thibault, who, throughout the walk, had not spoken a word to his son, suddenly halted.

"No, Antoine, I won't stand it. This time he's gone too far."

The young man made no reply.

It was nine o'clock in the evening and the school was closed. A night porter held the little wicket in the entrance-gate ajar.

"Know where my brother is?" Antoine asked in a peremptory tone.

The porter stared at him with a puzzled air.

M. Thibault stamped his foot angrily. "Go and fetch Abbé Binot," he said.

The porter escorted M. Thibault and his son to the waiting-room, drew a taper from his pocket, and lit the gas.

Some minutes elapsed. M. Thibault, who was out of breath, had settled down heavily into a chair. "Yes, this time we've had enough of it," he muttered through his clenched teeth.

"Excuse me, please." The Abbé Binot had entered without a sound. He was a small, mouse-like man, and now, to put his hand on Antoine's shoulder, had to draw himself up to his full height. "And how is our young doctor today?" he asked, adding at once: "But what's the trouble?"

"Where is my brother?"

"Jacques?"

"Jacques has not been home all day!" M. Thibault exclaimed, rising excitedly from his chair.

"Where can he have been?" the priest inquired, but without much show of surprise.

"Why, here, naturally! He was kept in."

The priest slipped his hands under his girdle. "Jacques was not kept in."

"What's that?"

"Jacques did not put in an appearance at school today."

Things were getting complicated. Antoine gave the priest a searching look, and with a jerk of his shoulders M. Thibault swung round on the little man his fat, puffy face, in which the eyes were almost hidden by their heavy lids.

"Jacques told us yesterday that he had four hours' detention. He left home this morning at the usual time. Later on, at about eleven, it seems, while we were all at mass, he came back and found everyone out except the cook. He said he wouldn't be back for lunch as he'd been given eight hours' detention instead of four."

"Which was a pure invention," the Abbé put in.

"I had to go out in the latter part of the afternoon," M. Thibault continued, "to hand in my monthly article to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It was the editor's reception-day, and I didn't get home till dinner-time. Jacques had not returned. At half-past eight I began to get alarmed. I sent for Antoine, who was on duty at his hospital. So now we have come to you."

The priest pursed his lips, as if in deep reflection. Through his half-parted eyelashes M. Thibault flashed a keen look first at the Abbé, then at his son.

"Well, Antoine, what do you make of it?"

"Obviously, Father," the young man said, "if he's run away on purpose we can discard any theory of an accident—which is so much to the good."

His attitude had a calming effect on M. Thibault, who drew up a chair and sat down again. His nimble mind was exploring several trains of thought, though his face, immobilized by its layers of fat, seemed perfectly expressionless. "Well," he said, "what's to be done?"

Antoine reflected. "This evening, nothing. We can only wait."

That there was no denying. But the impossibility of settling the business off-hand, by some drastic gesture, coupled with the thought of the Congress of Moral Science that was opening at Brussels in two days' time, and the invitation he had received to preside over the French section of it, brought a flood of angry colour to M. Thibault's temples. He stood up.

"I'll have the gendarmes on his track!" he cried. "There is still a police service in France, isn't there? And our criminals are sometimes caught, I suppose!"

His frock-coat flapped on either side of his paunch; the creases of his chin were nipped incessantly between the peaks of his stiff collar as he jerked his jaws forward like a horse chafing at the bridle. "The young ruffian!" he was thinking. "If only he could be run over by a train!" In a vivid flash of imagination he saw every difficulty smoothed out; no more trouble then about his attending the Congress, of which, quite possibly, he might be given the vice-presidency. But then, almost immediately, he visualized the boy brought home on a stretcher, a small corpse laid out on a bed, and a grief-stricken father—himself—beside it, surrounded by his sorrowing friends. And he was ashamed.

He turned to the priest again. "It's a terrible thing—yes, terrible—for a father to have to spend a night of such anxiety, to go through such an ordeal."

He began moving to the door. The Abbé withdrew his hands from his girdle.

"One moment, please," he said, lowering his eyes.

The lamplight fell on a forehead half concealed by a fringe of black hair and a weasel-like face that narrowed sharply down towards the pointed chin. Two pink spots began to show up on his cheeks.

"We have been wondering," he said, "whether we ought to apprise you at once of a most regrettable incident that took place a day or two ago, and which concerns your boy. But, as things are, it might throw some light on … Can you spare us a few moments, M.

Thibault?"

The Picard accent seemed to emphasize his hesitation. M. Thibault, without answering, went back to his chair and sat down heavily, closing his eyes.

"During the last few days," the priest went on,"we have become aware of certain offences, of a very special character, committed by your son … yes, particularly serious misconduct. In fact we had to threaten him with expulsion. Oh, of course, that was only to frighten him. He hasn't said anything to you?"

"Don't you know what a double-dealer the boy is? No, he has kept it to himself—as usual."

"The dear lad," the Abbé protested, "may have his faults, but he isn't bad at heart. No, we believe that on this last occasion it was weakness more than anything; he was led astray. It was the evil influence of another boy, one of those unhappy, perverted youngsters —of whom, alas, there are so many in Paris… ."

From the corner of an eye M. Thibault shot an apprehensive glance at the priest.

"These are the facts, M. Thibault, in the order of their happening. Last Thursday …" He reflected for a moment, then went on in an almost cheerful tone. "No, I made a mistake, it was Friday, the day before yesterday, Friday morning, during the morning study hour. Just before noon we entered the class-room—abruptly, as we always do… ." He gave Antoine a mischievous wink. "We turned the handle noiselessly and flung the door open.

"No sooner had we entered than our eyes fell on our little friend Jacques, whom we had placed just opposite the door on purpose. We went up to his desk and moved aside his dictionary. There it was—a book that had no business there! It was a novel, translated from the Italian, by an author whose name we have forgotten. The book was called *The Maidens of the Rocks*."

"Disgusting!" M. Thibault exclaimed.

"The boy was so perturbed that we concluded there was more behind it; we are used to that sort of thing. The luncheon bell was due to sound in a few minutes. When it rang we asked the master in charge to take the boys to the refectory. After they had gone we opened Jacques's desk and found two more books there: Rousseau's *Confessions* and something still more objectionable—I hardly like to name it—one of Zola's abominable books, *Abbé Mouret's Transgression*."

"He's dead to shame."

"We were about to close the desk when it occurred to us to feel behind the row of school-books, and we fished out an exercise-book in a grey linen binding, which at first sight looked innocent enough. But then we opened it and glanced through the first pages." The Abbé paused, his keen, ungentle eyes intent on M. Thibault and his son. "Well, we read enough then and there to make sure… . We carried the book off to a safe place and, during the midday recreation, found time to study it at leisure. The novels (they were in excellent bindings) had the initial 'F' stamped on their backs. The grey exercise-book, the most damning piece of evidence, if I may put it so, contained a series of letters in different writings. There were letters from Jacques, signed 'J,' and others, in a writing we did not recognize, signed 'D.' " He continued in a lower voice. "I am sorry to have to say that the tone, the tenor, of the letters left no doubt as to the nature of the friendship. So much so, M. Thibault, that for a while we took the firm, tall writing for that of girl or, more likely, a somewhat older woman. But, presendy, on studying the contents more carefully, we perceived that the unidentified script was that of a fellow-pupil of Jacques—not one of our boys here, thank God! but some boy whom Jacques must have met at the lycée. To make sure about it, we went that very same day to see the principal, our worthy friend M. Quillard"—he turned towards Antoine as he gave the name—"who is a man of the highest principles and knows only too well what goes on in boarding-schools. He recognized the writing at once. The miscreant who signed the letters with a 'D' is a third-form boy, a friend of Jacques. His name is Fontanin, Daniel de Fontanin."

"Fontanin!" Antoine exclaimed. "That explains it. You know, Father, those people who spend the summer at Maisons-Laffitte; they've a house on the outskirts of the forest. Now that I come to think of it, several times this winter, when I got home, I've found Jacques reading books of poetry lent him by this Fontanin boy."

"What? Borrowed books? Wasn't it your duty to let me know?"

"Oh, I didn't see much harm in them!" Antoine glanced towards the priest as he spoke, as if to show that he was not to be intimidated. And suddenly his thoughtful face lit up with a quick smile that came and went, giving it a singularly boyish look. "It was only Victor Hugo," he explained, "and Lamartine. But I took away his lamp, to prevent him keeping awake till all hours… ."

The priest's lips had stiffened. Now he took his revenge.

"But there's worse to come. This Fontanin boy's a Protestant!"

"I knew! I knew it!" There was an accent of despair in M. Thibault's cry.

"Quite a good pupil, however," the priest put in at once, as who should give the devil his due. "I can quote you M. Quillard's exact words. 'He's one of the older boys and we all thought highly of him— in fact he thoroughly hoodwinked all those with whom he came in contact. His mother, too, produced an excellent impression on us.' "

"Oh, his mother!" M. Thibault broke in. "They're impossible people, for all their airs and graces. Why, at Maisons, nobody has anything to do with them; they're scarcely nodded to in the street. Yes, Antoine, your brother can hardly boast of his choice of friends!"

"Dangerous friends!" the Abbé sighed. "Evil communications… . Yes, we know only too well what lies beneath the sanctimonious airs of Protestants.

"Be that as it may, when we came back from the lycée, we knew everything. And we had just decided to set a formal inquiry on foot when yesterday, at the beginning of the study hour, our little friend Jacques burst into our office. Literally burst in. His teeth were clenched and he was very pale. He didn't even say: 'Good morning,' but shouted at us from the threshold: 'Somebody has stolen my books and papers from my desk!' We pointed out to him that it was most unbecoming, bursting in like that. He refused to listen. His eyes, which are usually quite pale, were black with anger. 'It's you who stole my exercise-book!' he shouted. 'It's you, I know it!' He even went so far as to say," the Abbé added with a rather vacuous smile, "that if we dared to read it, he would kill himself. We tried to appeal to his better feelings, but he would not let us speak. 'Where's my exercise-book?' he kept on asking. 'Give it back. If you don't, I shall smash everything here!' Before we could stop him he picked up the crystal paper-weight on our desk—you remember it, Antoine? It was a souvenir some of our old boys had brought us from the Puy de Dôme—and threw it with all his might at the marble mantelpiece. Oh, that's a mere trifle," the Abbé added hastily, noticing M. Thibault's embarrassed gesture of regret. "I

only mention this small detail to show you the state of excitement your dear boy was in. Next moment he dropped on the floor in a sort of hysterical fit. We managed to secure him and pushed him into a little retiring-room next the study, and locked him in."

"Yes," M. Thibault said, raising his clenched hands dramatically, "there are days you'd think he was 'possessed.' Ask Antoine. How often we have seen him, when he's been crossed over some trifle, fall into such furious fits of temper that we've had to let him have his way! His face turns livid, the veins in his throat stand out, you'd think he was going to suffocate with rage."

"Yes," Antoine remarked, "we Thibaults are a hot-blooded family." He seemed to regret it so little that the priest felt compelled to smile indulgently.

"When we came to let him out an hour later," he continued, "he was sitting at the table, his head between his hands. He gave us a furious look; his eyes were tearless. When we bade him apologize, he did not answer. But he followed us quietly to our study. His hair was ruffled, his eyes were fixed on the ground, and there was a stubborn look on his face. We got him to pick up the fragments of the ill-fated paper-weight, but nothing would make him utter a word. So then we took him to the chapel where we thought it fitting that he should remain for a while in solitary communion with his Maker. After an hour we came and knelt beside him. He looked as if he had been crying, but the chapel was so dark that we couldn't be sure of it. We said a rosary in a low voice, and then we remonstrated with him, picturing to him his father's grief at hearing that an evil companionship had endangered his dear son's purity. He kept his arms folded and held his head high, his eyes fixed on the altar, as if he did not hear us. Seeing that there was nothing to be done with him, we told him to return to the study room. There he stayed till the afternoon was over, at his place, with his arms folded and without opening a book. We thought it best to take no notice of this conduct. At seven o'clock he left as usual, but without coming to say goodnight.

"So now you have the whole story, M. Thibault." The priest gave him a glance of eager curiosity. "We had meant not to inform you of these facts till we knew what action has been taken by the vice-principal of the lycée against that wretched young fellow Fontanin—summary expulsion, we presume. But, seeing you so upset …"

"M. l'Abbé," M. Thibault broke in; he was as out of breath as if he had been running upstairs. "M. l'Abbé, I am horrified—but you can guess for yourself what my feelings are. When I think what the future may have in store for us, now that Jacques's evil instincts have shown themselves—yes, I'm horrified," he repeated in a pensive voice, almost in a whisper. He sat unmoving, his head thrust forward, his hands resting on his hips. His eyes were closed and had it not been for the almost imperceptible quivering of his underlip, which shook the short white beard under the grey moustache, he would have seemed asleep.

"The young blackguard!" he burst out suddenly, with a forward jerk of his chin. The vicious glance that shot forth from between the grey eyelashes showed what a mistake it would have been to take his inertia at its face value. Shutting his eyes again, he swung round towards Antoine. But the young man was in a brown study, tugging at his beard, his forehead wrinkled and his eyes fixed on the floor.

"I shall go to the hospital," he said at last, "and tell them not to count on me tomorrow. The first thing in the morning I'll go and see this Fontanin boy and put him through it!"

"The first thing in the morning?" M. Thibault repeated mechanically. He rose from his seat. "Meanwhile, I've a sleepless night before me." Sighing, he moved ponderously towards the door.

The Abbé followed. On the threshold M. Thibault extended to the priest a flabby hand. "It's been a terrible blow," he murmured, without opening his eyes.

"We will pray God to help us in our time of trouble," the priest replied in a polite tone.

Father and son walked a few steps in silence along the empty street. The wind had dropped and the night air was mild. The month of May was beginning.

M. Thibault was thinking of the runaway. "Anyhow, if he's sleeping out, he won't find it too cold." Emotion made his legs go limp under him. He stopped and turned to his son. Antoine's attitude made him feel less unsure of himself, and he felt drawn towards his first-born, and proud of him—especially so tonight, now that his younger son was more antipathetic than ever. Not that he was incapable of love for Jacques; to quicken his affection it would have been enough had Jacques provided some satisfaction for his pride. But the boy's preposterous conduct and wayward impulses always galled him at his most sensitive point, his self-esteem.

"Let's only hope it doesn't cause too much scandal," he muttered. Then he drew nearer to Antoine and his tone changed. "I'm delighted that you were able to get off duty tonight." The feeling he was trying to express made him feel almost bashful. Still more embarrassed than his father, the young man kept silent. "Yes, Antoine, I'm glad to have you with me tonight, dear boy," M. Thibault continued and, for the first time perhaps, linked his arm with his son's.

# II

ON THAT Sunday, Mme. de Fontanin, when she came home at about midday, had found a note awaiting her in the hall.

"Daniel tells me he's been kept for lunch by the Bertiers," she told Jenny. "Then you weren't here when he came back?"

"No, I didn't see him," Jenny replied without looking up. She had just dropped on all fours, trying to catch her dog Puce, which was hiding under an arm-chair. It seemed to take her a long time, but at last she caught the dog up in her arms and ran off with it to her room, hugging and petting the little animal.

She did not reappear till lunch-time.

"I'm not a bit hungry," she said, "and I've got a headache. I'd like to go to my room and lie down in the dark."

Her mother put her to bed and drew the curtains. Eagerly Jenny snuggled down between the sheets. But sleep would not come to her. The hours dragged on. Several times in the course of the day Mme. de Fontanin came and laid her cool hand on the little girl's forehead. Towards evening, in a sudden rush of affection and anxiety, Jenny caught hold of her mother's hand and began fondling it, unable to keep back her tears.

"You're overstrung, darling. I'm afraid you must have a touch of fever."

Seven o'clock struck, then eight. Mme. de Fontanin was waiting for her son before beginning dinner. Never did Daniel miss a meal without telling her in advance; least of all would he have left his mother and sister to dine by themselves on a Sunday. Mme. de Fontanin went out onto the balcony. The evening was mild, but at this hour there were few people about in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. The shadows were deepening between the dark masses of the trees. Several times she fancied she recognized Daniel by his walk, under a street-lamp. There was the roll of a drum in the Luxembourg Gardens. The gates were being shut. Now it was quite dark.

She put on her hat and hurried to the Bertiers' house; they had been in the country since the day before.

So Daniel had lied!

Mme. de Fontanin was not unused to lies of that sort, but that Daniel, her Daniel, should have lied to her was appalling. His first lie. And he was only fourteen!

Jenny had not gone to sleep yet; she was listening intently to every sound. She called to her mother.

"Where's Daniel?"

"He's gone to bed. He thought you were asleep and didn't want to wake you." She tried to speak naturally; there was no point in alarming the child.

After glancing at the clock Mme. de Fontanin settled down in an arm-chair, leaving the door on the corridor ajar, so as to hear the boy when he returned.

So the night passed; a new day came… .

Just before seven Puce started growling. The bell had rung. Mme. de Fontanin ran into the hall; she preferred to open the door herself; the less the servants knew, the better. An unknown, bearded young man stood at the door. Had there been an accident?

Antoine gave his name, saying he would like to see Daniel before he left for the lycée.

"I'm afraid … as it so happens, my son can't be seen this morning," she stammered.

Antoine made a gesture of surprise. "Forgive me if I insist, Madame, but my brother, who's a great friend of your son's, has been missing since yesterday. Naturally, we're very anxious."

"Missing?" Her fingers tightened on the fabric of the light veil she had drawn round her hair. She opened the drawing-room door; Antoine followed her in.

"Daniel didn't come home yesterday, either. And I'm feeling worried, too." She had lowered her eyes; she looked up as she added: "All the more so as my husband is away from home just now."

There was a simplicity, a frankness, about her that Antoine had never seen in any other woman. Taken off her guard in this moment of anxiety, after a sleepless night, she made no effort to conceal her feelings from the young man; each successive emotion showed on her features in its natural colours. For a few moments they gazed at each other with all but unseeing eyes. Both were following the vagaries of their own thoughts.

Antoine had sprung out of bed with real detective zest. For he had not taken Jacques's escapade tragically, and only his curiosity was involved. So he had come here to put the other boy, Jacques's accomplice, "through it." But now again it looked as if things would be more complicated than he had foreseen. And that by no means displeased him. Whenever, as now, he came up against the unforeseen, a steely look came into his eyes, and under the square-cut beard his chin, the strong Thibault chin, set like a block of granite.

"What time yesterday morning did your son leave home?" he asked.

"Quite early. But he returned soon after."

"Ah! Was it between half-past ten and eleven?"

"About that."

"Like his friend! Yes, they've run away together." His tone was brisk; he sounded almost cheerful about it.

At that moment the door, which till now had stood ajar, was flung wide open and a child's body, clad only in a chemise, fell forward onto the carpet. Mme. de Fontanin gave a cry. Antoine had already picked up the little girl—she had fainted—and was holding her in his arms. With Mme. de Fontanin showing the way, he carried the child to her room and placed her on the bed.

"Leave her to me, Madame. I'm a doctor. Some cold water, please. Have you any smelling salts?"

After a few minutes Jenny came to. Her mother gave her an affectionate smile, but the child's eyes were unresponsive.

"She's all right now," Antoine said. "All she needs is to have some sleep."

Whispering: “You hear, darling?” Mme. de Fontanin laid her hand on the child’s clammy forehead. Presently the hand slipped down over the eyelids and held them closed.

They stood for a while unmoving on either side of the bed. The fumes of sal volatile hovered in the air. Antoine, whose eyes had so far been fixed on the graceful hand and outstretched arm, now discreetly took stock of Mme. de Fontanin. The lace wrapped round her head had come loose and he could see now that her hair was fair, sprinkled with strands of grey. He took her age for about forty, though her manner and the vivacity of her face were those of a much younger woman.

Jenny seemed on the point of sleeping; the hand that rested on her eyes withdrew, lightly as a feather. They went out on tip-toe, leaving the door ajar. Mme. de Fontanin, who was walking in front, turned round.

“Thank you,” she said, holding out both hands towards Antoine. The gesture was so spontaneous, so masculine, that Antoine checked his first impulse courteously to press his lips to them.

“She’s so nervous, poor child,” Mme. de Fontanin explained. “She must have heard Puce bark and thought her brother had come back. She hasn’t been at all well since yesterday morning; she’s had fever all night.”

They sat down. Mme. de Fontanin slipped her hand inside her bodice and produced the note Daniel had written her on the previous day. As Antoine read it, she kept her eyes on him. In her relations with others she always let herself be guided by her first impressions, and from the very first she had felt that she could trust Antoine. “A man with a forehead like that,” she thought, “is incapable of an unworthy act.” He wore his hair brushed back and his beard came up rather high upon his cheeks; framed in dark auburn hair, the whole expression of his face seemed concentrated in the deep-set eyes and pale expanse of forehead. He folded up the letter and handed it back to her. He appeared to be turning its contents over in his mind; actually he was wondering how to break certain matters to her.

“I think,” he began tentatively, “we may infer a connexion between their flight and the fact that their friendship—well, their intimacy— had just been detected by their teachers.”

“ ‘Detected’?”

“Yes. The correspondence they had been keeping up, in a special grey exercise-book, had just been found.”

“What correspondence?”

“They used to write letters to each other during lessons. Letters, it seems, of a … a very special nature.” He looked away from her. “So much so that the two offenders had been threatened with expulsion.”

“ ‘Offenders’? Really, I’m afraid I don’t follow. What was wrong about their writing to each other?”

“The tone of their letters was, I gather, so very …”

“ ‘The tone of their letters’?” Obviously she still did not understand. But she was too sensitive not to have noticed Antoine’s growing embarrassment. Suddenly she shook her head.

“Anything of that sort is out of the question,” she said in a strained voice that shook a little. It was as if a gulf had suddenly opened out between them. She stood up. “That your brother and my son may have planned some sort of schoolboy prank together is quite possible, though Daniel has never uttered in my presence the name of …”

“Thibault.”

“Thibault!” The name, it seemed, surprised her. “That’s curious. My little daughter had a bad dream last night and I distinctly heard her pronounce that name.”

“She may have heard her brother speaking of his friend.”

“No, I tell you that Daniel never …”

“How else could she have learned the name?”

“Oh, these ‘supranormal’ phenomena are fairly common, really.”

“What phenomena?”

“The transmission of thought.” There was an intense, almost otherworldly look on her face.

Her explanation and the tone in which she spoke were so new to him that Antoine looked at her curiously. There was more than earnestness on Mme. de Fontanin’s face; it was illuminated, and on her lips there flickered the gentle smile of the believer who is used to braving the scepticism of the rest of mankind.

For a while they were silent. Then Antoine was struck by an idea that rekindled his detective enthusiasm.

“May I ask you a question, Mme. de Fontanin? You say your daughter spoke my brother’s name. And that all day yesterday she was suffering from an inexplicable attack of fever. Mayn’t that be because your son confided in her before going away?”

Mme. de Fontanin smiled indulgently. “You’d realize that such a suspicion is absurd, M. Thibault, if you knew my children and the way they behave with their mother. Never has either of them hidden anything from—” She stopped abruptly, stung by the thought that Daniel’s recent conduct gave her the lie. “Still,” she went on at once, but with a certain stiffness, moving towards the door, “if Jenny isn’t asleep you can ask her about it yourself.”

The little girl had her eyes open. Her delicately moulded profile showed against the pillow; her cheeks were flushed. The black muzzle of the little dog peeped comically from between the sheets beside her.

“Jenny, this is M. Thibault—the brother of one of Daniel’s friends, you know.”

The child cast at the intruder a look that, eager at first, darkened with mistrust.

Antoine went up to the bed, took her wrist and drew out his watch.

“Still too quick,” he said. Then he listened to her breathing. He put into each professional gesture a rather self-complacent gravity.

“How old is she?”

“Almost thirteen.”

“Really? I wouldn’t have thought it. As a matter of principle one can never be too careful about these feverish attacks. Not that there’s anything to be alarmed about, of course,” he added, looking at the child and smiling. Then, moving from the bedside, he said in a different tone:

“Do you know my brother, Mademoiselle? Jacques Thibault?”

Her forehead wrinkled; she shook her head.

“Really and truly? Your brother has never talked to you about his best friend?”

"Never."

"But, Jenny," Mme. de Fontanin insisted, "don't you remember? When I woke you up last night you were dreaming that Daniel and his friend Thibault were being chased along a road. You said 'Thibault' quite distinctly."

The child seemed to be searching in her memory of the night. Then, "I don't know the name," she said at last.

"By the way," Antoine went on after a short pause, "I've just been asking your mother about a detail she can't remember; we've got to know it if we are to find your brother. How was he dressed?"

"I don't know."

"Then you didn't see him yesterday morning?"

"Yes, I did. Quite early—when he was having his coffee and rolls. But he hadn't dressed then." She turned to her mother. "You've only to go to his wardrobe, and see what clothes are missing."

"There's something else, Mademoiselle, something very important. Was it at nine o'clock, or ten, or eleven that your brother came back to leave the letter? Your mother was out then, so she can't say."

"I don't know."

Antoine caught a hint of annoyance in Jenny's voice.

"What a pity!" He made a gesture of disappointment. "That means we'll have trouble in getting on his track."

"Wait!" Jenny said raising her arm to make him stay. "It was at ten minutes to eleven."

"Exactly? Quite sure about it?"

"Yes."

"You looked at the clock while he was with you, I suppose."

"No. But that was the time when I went to the kitchen to get some bread-crumbs—for my drawing, you know. If he'd come before that, or if he'd come after, I'd have heard the door and gone to see."

"Yes, of course." He pondered for a moment. What use was it to tire her with more questions? He had been mistaken; she knew nothing. "Now," he went on, "you must make yourself comfy, and shut your eyes, and go to sleep." He drew the blankets up over the little bare arm, smiling to the child. "A nice long sleep, and when we wake up we'll be quite well again, and our big brother will be back at home."

She looked at him. Never afterwards could he forget all that he read at that instant in her gaze: an inner life quite out of keeping with her years, such indifference towards all human consolation, and a distress so deep, so desperately lonely, that he could not help being shaken by it and lowered his eyes.

"You were right," he said to Mme. de Fontanin, when they had returned to the drawing-room. "That child is innocence itself. She's suffering terribly, but she knows nothing."

"Yes," she replied in a musing tone, "she is innocence itself; but—*she knows*!"

"You mean …?"

"Yes."

"How can you think that? Surely her answers …?"

"Her answers?" she repeated in a slow, meditative voice. "But I was near her and I felt it somehow. No, I can't explain it." She sat down, but stood up again at once. Her face was anguished. "She knows, she knows—now I'm certain of it." Then suddenly, in a louder voice: "And I'm certain, too, that she would rather die than betray her secret."

After Antoine had left and before going to see M. Quillard, the principal of the lycée (as Antoine had advised her to do), Mme. de Fontanin yielded to her curiosity and opened a *Who's Who*.

> THIBAULT (Oscar-Marie). Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. Sometime Member for the Eure. Vice-president of the Child Welfare Society. Founder and President of the Social Defence League. Treasurer of the Joint Committee of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paris. Residence: 4A Rue de l'Université, Paris VI.

# III

TWO HOURS later, after her interview with the principal of the lycée, whom she had left abruptly, without a word, her cheeks aflame, Mme. de Fontanin, not knowing where to turn, decided to go and see M. Thibault. Some secret instinct warned her against the visit, but she overruled it, as she often overruled such premonitions—prompted by a fondness for taking risks and a temperamental wilfulness that she mistook for courage.

At the Thibaults' a regular family council was in session. The Abbé Binot had arrived at the Rue de l'Université at an early hour, but only a few minutes in advance of the Abbé Vécard, private secretary to His Grace the Archbishop of Paris. This priest was M. Thibault's confessor, and a great friend of the family. A telephone-call had secured his attendance.

Seated at his desk, M. Thibault had the air of a presiding judge. He had slept badly and the unhealthy pallor of his cheeks was even more pronounced than usual. M. Chasle, his secretary, a grey-haired, bespectacled little man, was seated on his employer's left. Antoine alone had remained standing, leaning against a bookcase. Mademoiselle, too, had been convoked, though it was the hour when normally she attended to her housekeeping. Her shoulders draped in black merino, she sat perched on the edge of her chair, silently observing the proceedings. Under the coils of grey hair looped round her yellow forehead the fawn-like eyes strayed constantly from one priest to the other. The two reverend gentlemen had been installed on either side of the fireplace, in high-backed chairs.

After laying before them the results of Antoine's inquiries M. Thibault launched into a jeremiad. He liked to feel that he was being approved of by those around him, and the words that came to him, when depicting his anxiety, quickened his emotions. But the presence of his confessor urged him to examine his conscience once again; had he fulfilled all his duties as a father towards the miserable boy? He hardly knew what to answer. Then his thoughts took a new turn: but for that wretched little heretic nothing would have happened.

Rising to his feet, he gave rein to his indignation. "Should not young blackguards like that Fontanin boy be locked up in suitable institutions? Are we to allow our children to be exposed to such contamination?" His hands behind his back, his eyelids lowered, he paced the carpet behind his desk. Though he did not refer to it, the thought of the Congress he was missing rankled bitterly. "For over twenty years I've been devoting myself to the problem of juvenile criminality. For twenty years I've been fighting the good fight, by means of pamphlets, vigilance societies, and detailed reports addressed to various congresses. But I've done more than that!" He turned towards the priests. "Haven't I created in my reformatory at Crouy a special department where depraved children belonging to a different social class from that of the other inmates are given a special course of moral re-education? Well, you'll hardly believe it, but that department is always empty! Is it for me to force parents to incarcerate their erring sons there? I've moved heaven and earth to get the Ministry of Education to take steps about it. But," he concluded, shrugging his shoulders and letting himself sink back into his chair, "what do those fine gentlemen who are ousting religion from our French schools care about public morals?"

At that moment the parlour-maid handed him a visiting-card.

"That woman!" he exclaimed, turning to his son. Then, addressing the maid, he asked: "What does she want?" and, without waiting for an answer, said to his son: "Antoine, you attend to this."

"You can't very well refuse to see her," Antoine pointed out, after glancing at the card.

On the brink of an outburst, M. Thibault mastered his feelings and turned again to the two priests.

"It's Mme. de Fontanin! What's to be done? A certain consideration is due to a woman, whoever she may be, isn't it? And we mustn't forget, this one is a mother."

"What's that? A mother?" M. Chasle murmured, but the remark was only for himself.

M. Thibault came to a decision. "Show the lady in."

When the maid brought the visitor up, he rose and bowed ceremoniously.

Mme. de Fontanin had not expected to find so many people there. She drew back slightly on the threshold, then took a step towards Mademoiselle, who had jumped from her chair and was staring at the Protestant with horrified eyes. The softness had gone out of them and, no longer fawn-like, she looked like an outraged hen.

"Mme. Thibault, I presume?" Mme. de Fontanin said in a low voice.

"No," Antoine hastened to explain. "This lady is Mile, de Waize, who has been with us for fourteen years—since my mother's death— and brought us up, my brother and myself."

M. Thibault introduced the men to her.

"Excuse me for disturbing you, M. Thibault," Mme. de Fontanin began. All the men's eyes converging on her made her feel uncomfortable, but she kept her self-possession. "I came to see if any news … Well, as we are both undergoing the same anxiety,. Monsieur, I thought the best thing for us might be to … to join forces. Don't you agree?" she added with a faint smile, cordial if a little sad. But her frank gaze, as she watched M. Thibault, found no more response than a blind man's stare.

She tried to catch Antoine's eye; despite the slight estrangement that the last phase of their conversation on the previous day had brought about, she felt drawn towards the young man whose pensive face and forthright manners were so different from the others'. He, too, as soon as she entered, had felt that a sort of alliance existed between them. He went up to her.

"And how is the little invalid now, Madame?"

M. Thibault cut him short. His impatience betrayed itself only in the way he kept on jerking his head to free his chin. Slewing himself round to face Mme. de Fontanin, he began addressing her with studied formality.

"It should be unnecessary for me to tell you, Mme. de Fontanin, that no one understands your natural anxiety better than myself. As I was saying to my friends here, we cannot think about those poor lads without feeling the utmost distress. And yet I would venture to put you a question: would it be wise for us to 'join forces' as you propose? Certainly something must be done, they have

got to be found; but would it not be better for us to keep our inquiries separate? What I mean is, we must beware of possible indiscretions on the part of journalists. Don't be surprised if I speak to you as one whose position obliges him to act with a certain caution as regards the press and public opinion. Not for my own sake. Anything but that! I am, thank God, above the calumnies of my adversaries. But might they not try to strike at the activities I stand for, by attacking me personally? And then I have to think of my son. Should I not make sure, at all costs, that another name is not linked with ours in connexion with this unsavoury adventure? Yes, I see it as my duty so to act that no one may be able in the future to throw in his face certain associations—quite casual, I grant you—but of a character that is, if I may say so, eminently … prejudicial." He seemed to be addressing the Abbé Vécard especially as, lifting his eyelids for once, he added: "I take it, gentlemen, that you share my opinion?"

During the harangue Mme. de Fontanin had turned pale. Now she looked at each priest in turn; then at Mademoiselle, then at Antoine. Their faces were blank and they said nothing.

"Ah, yes, I understand!" she cried. The words stuck in her throat, and she had difficulty in continuing. "I can see that M. Quillard's suspicions …" She paused, then added: "What a wretched creature that man is, a miserable, miserable creature!" A wry smile twisted her lips as she spoke. M. Thibault's face remained inscrutable. Only his flabby hand rose towards the Abbé Binot, as if calling him to witness, inviting him to speak. With the zest of a mongrel joining in a dog-fight, the Abbé flung himself into the fray.

"We would venture to point out to you, Mme. de Fontanin, that you seem to be dismissing the lamentable conclusions come to by M. Quillard, without even having heard the charges brought against your son."

Mme. de Fontanin cast a quick glance at the priest; then, relying as usual on her intuitions as regards the characters of others, she turned towards the Abbé Vécard, whose eyes met hers with an expression of unruffled suavity. His lethargic face, elongated by the fringe of scanty hair brushed up round his bald patch, gave her the impression of a man in the fifties. Conscious of the heretic's appealing gaze, he hastened to put in an amiable word.

"None of us here, Madame, but realizes how painful this conversation is for you. The trust you have in your son is infinitely touching … and laudable," he added as an afterthought. With a gesture that was familiar with him, he raised a finger and held it to his lips while he went on speaking. "But unfortunately, Madame, the facts, ah, yes, the facts …"

As if his colleague had given him the cue, the other priest took him up, and went on with greater unction. "Yes, the facts, there's no denying it, are … crushing!"

"I beg you," Mme. de Fontanin began, looking away.

But now there was no holding the priest.

"In any case, if you want proof of our assertions, here it is!" Dropping his hat onto the floor, he drew from his girdle a grey, red-edged exercise-book. "Please cast a glance over this, Madame. However cruel it may seem to kill your illusions, we feel it our bounden duty, and we are convinced that you will yield to the evidence."

He moved towards Mme. de Fontanin as if he were going to force the book on her. She got up from her chair.

"I refuse to read a line of it. The idea of prying into the secrets of this child behind his back, in public, without giving him a chance to explain—it's revolting! I have never treated him in such a manner, and I never will."

The Abbé Binot gazed at her, his arm still holding out the book, a sour smile on his thin lips.

"Have it your own way," he said at last, with a derisive intonation. He placed the book on the desk, picked up his hat, and sat down again. Antoine felt a great desire to grasp him by the shoulders and put him out. His disgust was visible in his eyes, which, meeting the Abbé Vécard's eyes, found them in accord.

Meanwhile Mme. de Fontanin's attitude had changed; she raised her head defiantly and walked up to M. Thibault, who had not risen from his chair.

"All this is beside the point, M. Thibault. I came here only to inquire what you propose to do. My husband is away from Paris at the moment and I have to act alone. What I really came for was to tell you that in my opinion it would be a great pity to call in the police."

"The police!" M. Thibault shouted, so exasperated that he rose from his chair. "But, my good woman, don't you realize that the police in every department of France are after them already? I telephoned myself this morning to the private secretary of the Chief of Police, asking that every possible step be taken, with the utmost discretion, of course. I have also had a telegram sent to the Town Council at Maisons-Laffitte, in case the truants have had the idea of hiding in a neighbourhood they both know well. All the railway companies, frontier posts, and ports of embarkation have been advised. And, Madame, if it weren't for the scandal, which I want to avoid at all costs, I'd say it would be a very good thing to give those two young ragamuffins the lesson they need, and have them brought home in handcuffs, escorted by the police—if only to remind them that even in these degenerate days there's still a semblance of justice in France, some deference to parental rights."

Without replying, Mme. de Fontanin bowed and moved towards the door. M. Thibault regained his self-control.

"Anyhow, Madame, you may rest assured that, if we get any news, my son will communicate with you at once."

She acknowledged the remark with an almost imperceptible nod. Antoine and, after him, M. Thibault escorted her to the door.

"The Huguenot!" Abbé Binot jeered, as soon as she was out of sight. The Abbé Vécard could not repress a gesture of reproach.

"What? A Huguenot?" M. Chasle stammered, and recoiled as if he had just trodden in some revolting offal from Saint Bartholomew's shambles.

# IV

ON HER return Mme. de Fontanin found Jenny lying half asleep in bed. Her fever showed no signs of going down. She lifted her head, gave her mother a questioning look, then shut her eyes again.

"Please take Puce away, Mother. The noise hurts me."

As soon as Mme. de Fontanin was back in her room a fit of dizziness came over her; she sank into a chair, without even taking off her gloves. "Am I, too, in for a spell of fever?" she wondered. "Just when I most need to keep my head, to be strong and confident." She bowed her head in prayer. When she raised it, she had settled on her line of action; the principal thing was to find her husband, bring him back.

Crossing the hall, she paused in front of a closed door, then opened it. The room was cool and had evidently not been used for some time; a faint, bitter-sweet tang of verbena and lavender hovered in the air —a scent of perfumed soaps and hair-oils. She drew aside the curtains. A desk occupied the centre of the room; a layer of fine dust covered the blotter. There were no papers lying about, no addresses, no clues. All the keys were in the locks. The man who used the room was certainly of a trusting nature. She pulled out a drawer in the desk and saw a number of letters, a few photographs, a fan, and, in a corner, screwed up in a ball, a shabby black silk glove. Her fingers tightened on the edge of the table. A memory floated up into her mind and, in her daydream, she seemed to be gazing at a half-forgotten scene.

One summer evening two years before, as she had been going in a tram along the bank of the Seine, she had caught a glimpse of something that made her stiffen up abruptly. Yes, she had recognized her husband Jerome, bending over a girl who was sitting on one of the benches by the riverside. The girl was crying. How often since then her fancy had cruelly enlarged on that brief glimpse, taking a sad pleasure in elaborating the details: the young woman shamelessly parading her grief, with her hat clumsily askew, and hastily extracting from her skirt a large, coarse handkerchief! And Jerome's expression, above all! How sure she was of having guessed aright the feelings that possessed him then! A little pity, to be sure, for she knew that he was weak and easily moved; and a good deal of exasperation at being involved in such a scene in public; and, behind it all, cruelty. Yes, in his very attitude as he bent forward solicitously but without real tenderness, she could see only too clearly the shallow compunction of the lover who has "had enough of it," who is perhaps already in quest of new adventure, and who, despite his pity, despite a secret shame, has decided to exploit the woman's tears to make the breach between them absolute. All this had been revealed to her in a flash of insight, and each time the haunting memory returned she felt the faintness she was feeling now.

She left the room hastily and locked the door.

A definite plan had suggested itself: that young maid she had had to dismiss six months ago—yes, she must see Mariette. Mme. de Fontanin knew the address of her new place. Mastering her distaste, without further hesitaton, she went there.

The kitchen opened onto a service-staircase, on the fourth floor. It was the unsavoury hour of washing-up. Mariette opened the door. She was a bright little thing with golden curls and candid eyes—hardly more than a child. When she saw her former mistress, she blushed, but her eyes lit up.

"It's very nice seeing you again, Ma'am. … Is Miss Jenny all right?"

Mme. de Fontanin hesitated, an anguished smile on her lips.

"Mariette—please tell me my husband's address."

The girl blushed scarlet; her large, puzzled eyes filled with tears. The address? She shook her head, she didn't know—not where he was *now*. The master hadn't been living at the hotel where … No, he had dropped her almost immediately. "Then you don't know, Ma'am?" she added innocently.

But Mme. de Fontanin was moving away towards the door, with lowered eyes; she could not bear hearing any more. There was a short silence. The water in a saucepan was boiling over, hissing as it fell onto the range. Without thinking, Mme. de Fontanin pointed to it.

"Your water's boiling over," she said. Then, still moving towards the door, she added: "Are you happy here, my dear?"

The girl made no reply. When Mme. de Fontanin looked up, it seemed to her that there was something of the animal in the eyes and the keen teeth that showed between the young, parted lips. After a pause that seemed interminable to both, the girl brought herself to speak.

"Couldn't you ask … Mme. Petit-Dutreuil?" she stammered.

Mme. de Fontanin did not hear the burst of sobbing that followed. She was hurrying down the stairs as if the house were on fire. That name had cast a sudden light on a number of coincidences she had hardly noticed at the time and had forgotten immediately. Now they all came back, and each fell into place in a chain of damning evidence.

An empty cab was passing; she jumped into it—the sooner she was home, the better. But, on the point of giving her address, an uncontrollable impulse gripped her—she fancied she was obeying a prompting from above.

"Rue de Monceau," she told the driver.

A quarter of an hour later she was ringing at the door of her cousin, Noémie Petit-Dutreuil.

A fair-haired little girl of about fifteen opened the door. Her eyes smiled a greeting to the visitor.

"Good morning, Nicole. Is your mother at home?"

She was conscious of the child's stare of astonishment.

"I'll go and fetch her, Aunt Thérèse."

Mme. de Fontanin waited in the hall. Her heart was beating so rapidly that she pressed her hand to her breast and dared not take it away. She tried to bring her emotions under control. The drawing-room door was open and the sun was bringing out the sheen of the

velvet curtains and the colours of the carpet. The room had the carless elegance of a bachelor's "den." "And they said her divorce had left her penniless," Mme. de Fontanin murmured. The thought reminded her that her husband had not sent her any money for two months; how was she to meet this month's bills? And, following it, another thought crossed her mind: could Noémie's unexpected opulence have come from—him?

Nicole did not return. Not a sound could be heard. More and more ill at ease, Mme. de Fontanin entered the drawing-room and sat down. The piano was open; a fashion paper was lying on the sofa; cigarettes lay on a low table; there was a bunch of red carnations in a vase. The more she looked around her, the more disturbed she felt. What could it be?

Because *he* was here, and his presence filled the room. It was he who had pushed the piano at that angle to the window, exactly as in her own home. It was he who had left it open or, if not he, it was for his sake that music lay scattered on it. It was he who had insisted on that wide, low sofa and the cigarette-box within easy reach. And it was he whom she now pictured there, lolling amongst the cushions, spruce and debonair as usual, gay eyes flashing under the long lashes, an arm dangling over the sofa edge, a cigarette between his fingers.

A soft, rustling sound made her start. Noémie had just entered, in a lace-trimmed dressing-gown, her arm resting on her daughter's shoulder. She was a tall, dark, and rather plump woman of thirty-five.

"Good morning, Thérèse; you must excuse me. I've had such a frightful headache all day, it's laid me out completely. Nicole dear, will you pull down the blind?"

The sparkle of her eyes and the healthy pink cheeks gave her the lie. Her volubility betrayed the embarrassment she felt at Thérèse's visit, an embarrassment that grew to alarm when the latter, turning towards the child, said gently:

"There's something I want to talk to your mother about, darling. Would you leave us alone for a few minutes?"

"Run off to your room, Nicole, and do your lessons there." Noémie turned to her cousin with a high-pitched, unnatural laugh. "Children of that age are so annoying, aren't they?—always wanting to show off in the drawing-room. Is Jenny like that? I'm afraid I was just the same, do you remember? It used to drive poor Mother to despair."

The object of Mme. de Fontanin's visit had been only to get the address she required. But now she was here, Jerome's presence had made itself so strongly felt, the injury done her seemed so flagrant, and the sight of Noémie flaunting her rather vulgar beauty in this room offended her so deeply that once again she gave way to impulse and came to a sudden, desperate decision.

"Do sit down, Thérèse," Noémie said.

Instead of sitting down, Thérèse walked towards her cousin and held out her hand. The gesture was not in the least theatrical; it was too spontaneous,' too dignified for that.

"Noémie, give me back my husband!" The words came with a rush. The smile froze on Mme. Petit-Dutreuil's lips. Mme. de Fontanin was still holding her hand. "You needn't answer. I'm not blaming you—I know only too well what he is." She paused for a moment, breathless. Noémie did not take advantage of the moment to defend herself, and Mme. de Fontanin was glad of her silence, not that it was tantamount to a confession but because it showed that she was not so hardened as to be able to parry such a home-thrust on the spur of the moment.

"Listen, Noémie," Mme. de Fontanin continued. "Our children are growing up. Your daughter … and my two children as well. Daniel's over fourteen now. You know the terrible effects of bad examples, how contagious evil is. Things can't go on like this any longer—I'm sure you agree. Soon I shan't be the only one to watch him … and to suffer." A note of pleading came into her voice. "Yes, give him back to us, Noémie."

"But, Thérèse, I assure you… . Why, you must be off your head!" The younger woman was recovering her self-composure, but there was a glint of anger in her eyes, and her lips were set. "Yes, you must be mad, Thérèse, to think of such a thing. It was silly of me to let you go on talking like that, but I couldn't believe my ears. You've been dreaming—or else been listening to a lot of ridiculous gossip. Now I want you to explain."

Mme. de Fontanin gave her cousin a pensive, almost affectionate glance that seemed to say: "Poor stunted soul! Still, your heart is better than your way of living." But then her eyes fell on the smoothly rounded shoulder, the soft voluptuous flesh that seemed fluttering, like a trapped dove, beneath the gauzy lace. And the picture that rose before her eyes was so realistic that she had to close them. A look of hatred, then of grief, flitted across her face. She felt her courage failing, and decided to put an end to the interview.

"Well, perhaps I'm mistaken. But do, please, give me his address. No, not his address. I only ask you, let him know that I have need of him."

Noémie stiffened up. "Let him know? Do you think *I* know where he is?" She had gone very red. "Look here, Thérèse, I've had about enough of your nonsense. I admit Jerome comes to see me now and then. Why not? We make no secret of it. After all, we're cousins. Why shouldn't we?" Instinct gave her the words that would cut deepest. "He'll be *so* tickled when I tell him that you came and made this absurd scene. I wish you could be here then!"

Mme. de Fontanin drew back. "You're talking like a prostitute."

"Very well then, do you want to hear the truth?" Noémie retorted. "When a woman's husband leaves her, it's her own fault. If Jerome had found in your company what he gets elsewhere, you wouldn't have to go running after him, my dear."

Mme. de Fontanin could not help asking herself: Can it be true? Her nerves were at their breaking-point and she felt inclined to leave at once. But she could not face the prospect of being back at home again, without the address, without any means of getting in touch with Jerome. Her eyes softened once more.

"Noémie, please forget what I said just now and listen to me. Jenny's ill, she's had a temperature for two days, and I'm alone. You are a mother, you must know what it is to watch at the bedside of a child who's starting an illness. For three weeks now Jerome hasn't been home, not once. Where is he? What's he doing? He *must* be told his daughter's ill; he must come back. Do tell him that." Noémie shook her head, wholly unmoved by the appeal. "Oh, Noémie, it's not possible you've grown so heartless! Listen, I'm going to tell you everything; it's true that Jenny's ill and I'm dreadfully worried about her; but that's not the worst." Her voice was humbler yet. "Daniel has left me; he's run away."

"Run away?"

"Yes. Inquiries will have to be made. I simply can't remain alone at such a time—with a sick child on my hands. Surely you understand that? Noémie, do please tell him he must come back."

For a moment Mme. de Fontanin thought the younger woman was about to give way; there was a look of sympathy on her face. But then she turned abruptly away and cried, raising her arms to emphasize the words:

"But, good heavens, what do you expect me to do about it? Didn't I tell you just now I can't help you in any way?" And when Mme. de Fontanin disgustedly refrained from answering, she swung round on her with blazing cheeks. "You don't believe me, Thérèse, eh? So much the worse for you; now you shall know everything. He's let me down again—bolted, I don't know where! Run away with another woman. So now you know! Well, do you believe me?"

All the colour had left Mme. de Fontanin's face. Unthinking, she repeated: "Run away with another woman!"

Noémie had flung herself upon the sofa and buried her head among the cushions.

"Oh, if you only knew how he's made me suffer! I've forgiven him too often, so he thinks I'll go on forgiving him all the time. He's greatly mistaken. Never again! The way he's treated me is positively atrocious. Under my eyes, in my own house, he seduced a little slut of a maid I had here, a wretched brat of nineteen. She decamped, bag and baggage, a fortnight ago without giving notice or anything. And, would you believe it, he was waiting for her at the front door, with a cab!" Her voice grew shrill and she jumped up from the sofa. "In the street where I live, at my own door, in broad daylight, with my own servant. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

Mme. de Fontanin had gone to the piano and was steadying herself against it; she was feeling on the verge of collapse. A picture was taking form before her, of Mariette as she had seen her a few months earlier, of all the little things she had noticed then, their furtive contacts as they brushed against each other in the hall, her husband's surreptitious expeditions up to the sixth floor, where the maid's bedroom was, until that day when it had become impossible to overlook what was going on, when she had had to dismiss the girl, who, overcome by remorse, had begged her mistress's forgiveness. And she remembered the glimpse she had had of that little shop-girl in black, drying her eyes, beside the river bank. Now, looking up, she saw Noémie in front of her, and she averted her eyes. But her gaze drifted involuntarily back to the handsome woman sprawling across the sofa, the bare shoulder shaken by spasms of sobbing, and the gleam of white flesh under the filmy lace. And the picture that rose before her then was the most horrible of all.

Noémie's voice was reaching her consciousness by fits and starts.

"But it's over now! I'm through with him. He can come back, he can go down on his bended knees, I won't give him a look. I hate and despise him. I've caught him lying time after time without the faintest reason, just to amuse himself, because he's built that way. He can't open his mouth without lying. He doesn't know what it means to tell the truth."

"You're unjust to him, Noémie."

The younger woman sprang up in amazement. "You of all people! *You* defend him!" But Mme. de Fontanin had regained her self-control; when she spoke again her voice had changed.

"You haven't got the address of that … that maid?"

Noémie reflected for a moment, then, bending towards her, answered with a confidential air:

"No. But the concierge, perhaps …"

Thérèse cut her short with a quick gesture, and began to move towards the door. To hide her discomfiture Noémie buried her face amongst the cushions and made as if she did not see her going.

In the hall, as Mme. de Fontanin was drawing aside the front-door curtain, she suddenly felt Nicole's arms hugging her passionately; the little girl's face was wet with tears. She had no time to say anything to the child, who kissed her again, almost hysterically, and ran back into the apartment.

The concierge was only too glad to gossip. "Yes, Ma'am, I readdress her letters to the place in the country where she comes from. It's Perros-Guirec, in Brittany; her folks send them on to her, I expect. If you'd like to know the address …" She opened a greasy, well-thumbed address-book.

On her way home Mme. de Fontanin entered a post-office, and filled in a telegraph-form.

Victorine Le Gad,
Place de l'Eglise,
Perros-Guirec, Côtes-du-Nord.

Please inform M. de Fontanin that his son Daniel disappeared last Sunday.

Then she asked for a postcard.

Pastor Gregory,
Christian Healers Group,
2A Boulevard Bineau,
Neuilly-sur-Seine.

Dear James,

Daniel left home two days ago without saying where he was going. I have had no news from him and I am terribly worried. To make things worse, Jenny is ill; she has a high temperature, but we don't know yet what's wrong. And I cannot let Jerome know, as I don't know where he is.

I am feeling very lonely, my dear friend. Please come.

Thérèse de Fontanin.

# V

TWO days later, Wednesday, at six o'clock in the evening, a tall, ungainly, grotesquely thin man, whose age it was impossible to guess, made his appearance at the building in which Mme. de Fontanin's flat was situated.

The concierge shook her head. "The poor young lady's dying, and the doctors are with her. They won't let you see her."

The pastor climbed the stairs. The door on the landing was open. The hall seemed full of men's overcoats. A nurse came running up the hall.

"I am Pastor Gregory," he said to her. "What's wrong? Is Jenny …?"

The nurse stared at him, murmured: "She's dying," and turned off into one of the rooms.

He shook all over as if he had been dealt a blow. It seemed to him the air had suddenly become unbreathable, stifling. Going into the drawing-room, he opened both windows wide.

Ten minutes passed. People were moving to and fro in the passage, doors opening and shutting. There was a sound of voices. Mme. de Fontanin appeared, followed by two elderly men in black. When she saw Gregory she ran towards him.

"Oh, James! At last you've come! Please, please don't leave me now."

"I only got back from London today," he explained.

She drew him aside, leaving the two doctors to their consultation. In the hall Antoine, in his shirt-sleeves, was plying a nail-brush over a basin the nurse was holding in front of him. Mme. de Fontanin grasped the pastor's hands. She had changed out of recognition; her cheeks were pale and haggard, her lips were quivering.

"Please stay beside me, James. Don't leave me alone. Jenny is …"

A sound of moaning came from the far end of the flat and, without ending the phrase, she hurried back to the bedroom.

The pastor went up to Antoine; his anxious look voiced an unspoken question.

Antoine shook his head. "I'm afraid there's no hope."

"Come, come! Why talk in that way?" Gregory sounded indignant.

"It's meningitis," Antoine said with a certain emphasis, raising his hand to his forehead. "What a queer bird!" he was thinking, as he looked at the English pastor.

Gregory's face was peaked and sallow; his long black hair, lustreless as a dead man's, straggled over a high, straight forehead. He had a long, pendulous nose flushed an unhealthy red, and the eyes, jet-black, almost without whites, deep-set beneath heavy brows, had an oddly phosphorescent glow. They brought to mind the eyes of certain monkeys; they had the same restlessness, the same melting softness combined with the same obduracy. Yet more unusual was the lower half of his face. He seemed to be perpetually laughing, but with a laugh that expressed no known emotion and twisted his mouth into all sorts of unexpected shapes. The chin was no less odd: it was hairless, and drawn skin-tight over the bones like a wrapper of old parchment.

"Was it sudden?" the pastor asked.

"The fever began on Sunday, but the symptoms became definite only yesterday morning. I arranged for a consultation at once. Everything possible has been done." His face grew earnest. "We shall hear what my colleagues have to say, but in my opinion—well, I'm afraid the poor child is …"

"Don't!" the pastor exclaimed in English, in a hoarse, harsh voice. His eyes were fixed on Antoine's; their indignation contrasted quaintly with the laugh that never left his mouth. As though the air were stifling him, he raised an emaciated hand towards his collar, spreading out the fingers stiffly. The hand looked like some hideous spider resting on his throat.

Antoine was studying the pastor with a professional eye. "Remarkably asymmetrical, that face," he was thinking, "what with that silent laugh, that vacant, maniacal grimace, and the rest of it."

Gregory addressed him in a formal tone. "Might I know if Daniel has returned?"

"No, and there's no news of him."

His voice grew tender. "Poor, poor lady!" he murmured.

Just then the two doctors came out of the drawing-room. Antoine went up to them.

"She's dying," the elder of the two said in a nasal voice, placing his hand on Antoine's shoulder. Antoine turned and glanced at the pastor.

The nurse came up and asked in a low voice: "Really, doctor, do you think there's no …?"

Gregory moved away so as to hear no more. The oppression in the air was more than he could endure. Through the half-open door he saw the staircase; he hurried down it into the open air. Crossing the avenue he began to run straight ahead under the trees, his hair fluttering in disorder, his spidery fingers splayed across his chest. Eagerly he inhaled the cool evening air, his mouth still gaping in a preposterous laugh. "Those accursed doctors!"

He was as devoted to the Fontanins as if they had been his own family. When he had landed in Paris, sixteen years before, without a penny in his pocket, it was Pastor Perrier, Thérèse's father, who had befriended him. And he had never forgotten. Later on, during his benefactor's last illness, he had thrown qp his work to hasten to his bedside, and the old pastor had died with one hand in his daughter's and the other in that of Gregory—his son, as the old man always called him. It all came back to him so poignantly at that moment that he turned on his heel and strode rapidly to the house. The doctors' carriage was no longer standing in front of it. He ran upstairs.

The front door had been left ajar. A sound of moans guided him to Jenny's room. In the semi-darkness he could hear the child whimpering, gasping for breath. It was all that Mme. de Fontanin, the nurse, and maid could do among them to keep the little body still. It was twisting convulsively like a fish dying on a river bank.

For a few moments Gregory did not speak, but watched them with a surly look on his face, pinching his chin between his fingers. At last he bent towards Mme. de Fontanin.

"They'll kill your child between them!"

"Kill her? What ever do you mean!" she exclaimed, as she clutched at Jenny's arm, which kept on slipping from her grasp.

"If you don't drive them out"—he spoke with deep conviction— "they'll kill Jenny."

"Who will?"

"Every one of them!"

She stared at him blankly—could she believe her ears? His sallow face bending above her looked terrifying.

One of Jenny's hands was fluttering outside the sheets; he gripped it and, stooping over the bed, began talking to her in a low, crooning voice.

"Jenny! Jenny darling! Don't you know me?"

Her distraught eyes, which had been staring up at the ceiling, swung slowly round towards the pastor's. Then, bending still nearer, he let his gaze sink deep into hers, and such was its insistence that the child ceased suddenly to whimper.

"Stop holding her!" he said to the three women, and, as none of them complied, he added, without moving his head, in a voice that admitted no denial: "Give me her other hand. All is well. Now, go!"

They moved away from the bed. Alone at the bedside, he bent over the dying child, mastering her with the hypnotic fixity of his eyes. The child's arms struggled convulsively in his grip for a few moments, then gently sank towards the sheets. For a time the legs went on twitching, then they too relaxed. And, subdued at last, the tired eyes closed. Still bending over her, Gregory signed to Mme. de Fontanin to approach.

"Look," he murmured, "she's quiet now, she's calmer. Drive them away, I tell you, drive away those sons of Belial. Error alone dominates them, and Error had all but killed your child."

He laughed, with the soundless laugh of a mystic who is in sole possession of the eternal verities, for whom the rest of the world is composed of madmen. Without shifting his gaze, still fixed on Jenny's eyes, he went on in a lower voice.

"Woman, I tell you *There is no Evil*! It's you who bring it into being 'and give it its baneful power—because you fear it, because you admit its existence. Now, for instance, those men have given up hope. They all say: 'She is …' And you think the same thing. You all but said it just now. 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' Poor little one, when I entered this room, there was nothing round her but the void, nothing but the Negative… . But I deny the Negative; I say: '*She is not ill*!"

The violence with which he spoke was so compelling that the women were carried away by his conviction.

"She is well!" he added. "But leave me alone with her now."

With the dexterity of a conjurer, he gradually relaxed his hold on the child's wrists, finger by finger, then gave a little backward jump, leaving her limbs free. She lay, relaxed and docile, on the bed.

"Life is good!" he chanted. "And all things are good. Good is wisdom, and good is love. All health is in Christ, and Christ is in us all."

He turned to the maid and nurse, who had moved away to the far end of the room. "Please go, and leave me with her."

"Yes, go!" Mme. de Fontanin said. But Gregory had drawn himself up to his full height and his outstretched arm seemed to be hurling an anathema at the table with its medicine bottles and compresses and the bowl of crushed ice. "First take these things away!" he commanded.

The women obeyed.

No sooner was he alone with Mme. de Fontanin than he cried cheerfully: "Now, open the window! Open it as wide as you can, my dear."

Outside in the street a cool breeze was rustling in the tree-tops. Sweeping into the room, it seemed to hurl itself on the polluted air, driving it aloft in eddying flurries and in a final onslaught whirling it outside the window. And then it laid its cool caress on the sick child's burning cheeks. She shivered.

"Won't she catch cold?" Mme. de Fontanin murmured.

A cheerful grin was his first rejoinder. At last he spoke.

"Yes, you can shut it now. Yes, all is well. And now light all your lights, Mme. de Fontanin. We must have brightness round us, we must have joy. And in our hearts too we must have light, and joy abounding. 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?' " And, raising his hands, he added: " 'Thou hast granted me to come before the accursed hour.' "

He drew up a chair to the bedside. "Be seated," he said. "You must be calm, perfectly calm. Hold on to the Personal Control. Listen only to the promptings of Our Lord. I say to you it is Christ's will that she shall recover. Let us share His will. Let us invoke the mighty power of Good. Spirit is everything, everything is spirit. The material is dominated by the spiritual. For two days this poor child has been exposed to the influences of the Negative. With what disgust those men and Women inspire me! Their minds are bent upon the worst, and they can evoke nothing but the powers of ill. And they think that 'all is over' when they have come to the end of their wretched, puling little 'certainties'!"

The moans set in again and Jenny began tossing about on the bed. Suddenly she threw back her head and her lips parted as if she were about to breathe her last. Mme. de Fontanin flung herself on the bed, her body stretched above the child's and cried out passionately:

"No, no! For pity's sake!"

The pastor advanced on her, as if he held her responsible for the sudden crisis.

"Afraid? So your faith has failed you? Fear is of the body only. In God's presence there is no fear. Put aside your carnal being, it is not truly you. Hear what Jesus Christ says: 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' Now, have done with fear and—pray!" She knelt down. "Pray!" he repeated sternly. "Pray first of all for yourself, oh doubting soul! May God restore to you trust and peace. It is in your perfect trust that the child will find salvation. Call on God's Holy Spirit. I unite my heart with yours. Now, let us pray."

He communed with himself for a while, then began the prayer. He was standing up, his feet together, his arms folded, his closed eyes turned heavenward; wisps of hair straggled on his forehead like an aureole of black flames. At first it was only a faint

murmuring, but gradually the words became distinct, and, like the deep, rhythmic drone of a church organ, the laboured breathing of the child accompanied the invocation.

"Omnipotent, creative Breath of Life, Thou who art everywhere, in every tiny atom of all Thy creatures, I call upon Thee from the depths of my heart. Fill with Thy peace this sorely afflicted home. Drive far away from this couch all that is not a thought of life. Evil lies only in our weakness. O Lord, cast out of us the Negative.

"Thou alone art Infinite Wisdom, and all Thou doest with us is according to the Law. Therefore this woman commends to Thee her child, on the threshold of death. She makes her daughter over to Thy will; Thy will be done. And if it must be that this young child be snatched from her mother, she bows to Thy decree."

"Oh, James, please don't say that," she moaned. "Not that! Not that!"

Gregory did not move from where he stood, but she felt his hand fall heavily on her shoulder.

"O woman of little faith," he said, "can this be you, you on whose heart the heavenly spirit has breathed so often?"

"Oh, James, these last three days have been more than I could bear. I can't, I can't bear any more!"

He stepped back a pace. "I look at her—and it is no longer she. I can no longer recognize her. She has let Evil enter into her soul, into the holy temple of the Lord… . Pray, poor soul, pray!"

The child's limbs were twitching under the bedclothes, racked by violent discharges of pent-up nervous force. Her eyes seemed starting out of their sockets, as they roved round the room, staring at each lamp in turn. But Gregory paid no attention to her. Clasping the little girl tightly in her arms, Mme. de Fontanin did her best to check the convulsions.

"All-Powerful Force," the pastor intoned, "Thou who art the Truth and the Life, Thou hast said: 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself.' So be it. If this mother is to be bereaved of her child, she bows herself to Thy will."

"No, James, no!"

The pastor bent towards her.

"Renounce! Renunciation is the leaven; as leaven works in dough, so does renunciation with all evil thinking, making the Good rise." He drew himself up. "And so, O Lord, if it is Thy will, take her daughter from her. She yields her child to Thee. And if Thou hast need of her son also …"

"No! No!"

."… and if Thou hast need of her son also, let him, too, be reft from her! May he never cross again his mother's threshold!"

"My Daniel! Oh, for pity's sake!"

"Lord, she yields her son to Thy wisdom, with her free consent And, if her husband must be taken from her, let him be taken, too!"

"Not Jerome. No… ." Her voice was broken with emotion and she had sunk onto her knees.

"May he, too, be taken from her!" the pastor cried, his voice rising in a wild ecstasy. "May he be taken, without cavil, and in obedience to Thy will alone, O Fountainhead of Light, Source of all Good, Spirit Divine!"

For a while he was silent; then, without looking at her, he asked: "Well, have you made the sacrifice?"

"Please have some pity, James. I can't, I can't …!"

"Then pray." After some minutes had passed, he spoke again. "Well, have you made the sacrifice, the sacrifice of all you love?"

She made no answer but fell forward, fainting, onto the bed… .

Nearly an hour had passed. There was no movement from the bed; only the child's swollen head kept tossing to and fro upon the pillow. Her cheeks were red and each intake of breath seemed to rasp her throat. Her unclosing eyes had the blank stare of madness.

Suddenly, though Mme. de Fontanin had not moved or spoken, the pastor gave a start as if she had called his name, then went and knelt beside her. She drew herself up; her features were less strained. For a long while she gazed at the young face lying on the pillow.

Stretching out her arms, she cried: "Not my will, but Thy will be done, O Lord!"

Gregory had never doubted that these words would be spoken, at their due hour. His eyes were closed; with all his fervour he was invoking the grace of God.

The night wore on. At times it seemed as if the child were at her last gasp, that what little life remained to her was flickering out, as intermittently her eyes grew dim. Now and again her body was racked by spasms of pain; each time this happened Gregory took her hand in his and raised his voice in humble prayer.

"We shall gather in our harvest. But prayer is needed. Let us pray."

Towards five o'clock he rose, replaced a blanket that had slipped onto the floor, and flung the window open. The cold night air poured into the room. Mme. de Fontanin, who was still on her knees, made no movement to restrain him.

He went out onto the balcony. There was little sign of dawn as yet. The sky was still a dim metallic grey and the avenue a long tunnel of darkness. But beyond the Luxembourg Gardens there was a faint sheen on the horizon, and wraiths of mist were drifting up the avenue, swathing the black tree-tops in fleecy vapour. To keep himself from shivering, Gregory stiffened his arms and clenched his hands on the balcony rail. Waves of coolness borne on the light breeze bathed his moist forehead and pale cheeks, on which the long vigil and the strain of fervent prayer had left their mark. Gradually the roofs were turning blue, and bright rectangles of Venetian blinds were taking form upon the drab, smoke-grimed walls.

The pastor gazed towards the sunrise. From the sombre depths of shadow a flood of light was surging up towards him, a rosy glow that slowly permeated all the sky. Nature was waking, millions of dancing atoms sparkling in the morning air. And suddenly his chest seemed swelling with a breath of new-born life, a preternatural energy penetrated him, filling him with a sense of incommensurable vastness. In a flash he grew aware of boundless possibilities; his mind controlled the universe, nothing was forbidden him. He could bid that tree: "Tremble!" and it would tremble; say to that child: "Arise!" and, lo, she would rise from the dead. He stretched forth his arm and suddenly, as if in answer to the gesture, the foliage of the avenue began to quiver and a cloud of birds rose twittering with joy into the brightening air.

He went back to the bed and laid his hand on the head of the mother, who was still kneeling at the bedside.

"Now all things have been made clean, let us rejoice, my dear. Hallelujah!"

He moved to Jenny's side.

“The shadows are cast forth. Give me your hands, sweetheart.”

For two days the child had hardly understood a word, but now she gave her hands to him.

“Look at me!” he bade her, and the haggard eyes, which had seemed to have lost the faculty of seeing, gazed into his eyes.

“ ‘For He shall redeem thee from death … and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.’ You are well, my little one. The shadows all have fled. Glory be to God! Now, pray!”

The light of understanding had come back to the child’s eyes, her lips were moving.

“And now, darling, let your eyelids close. Quite softly. That’s right… . Now sleep, for all your troubles are over. Now you must sleep— for joy!”

Some minutes later—for the first time in fifty hours—Jenny fell asleep. Quiet at last, her head nestled upon the pillow, her eyelashes cast tranquil shadows on her cheeks, and through the parted lips her breath flowed in an even cadence. She was saved.

# VI

IT WAS a school exercise-book bound in plain grey cloth which Jacques and Daniel had selected as being least likely to catch the master's attention when they passed it to and fro. The first pages were filled with queries jotted down in haste.

What are the dates of Robert the Pious?
Which is it, *rapsody* or *rhapsody*?
What's the trans, of *eripuit*?

And so forth. Then came some pages filled with notes and corrections, presumably referring to poems Jacques had written—on separate sheets.

Presently, however, the two boys settled down to a steady exchange of letters.

The first letter of any length was written by Jacques:

> *Paris, Llycée Amyot, Form IIIA, under the suspicious eye of QQ, alias Hogshair. Monday, March 17; the time being 3 hours, 31 minutes, and 15 seconds p.m.*
>
> Is your prevailing mood one of indifference, of sensuality, or of love? I rather think it must be number three, which is more natural to you than the others.
>
> Personally, the more I study my feelings, the more I realize that man's a BRUTE, and love alone can rescue him from that state. That is the cry of my stricken heart and my heart speaks true! Without you, best beloved, I should be a hopeless fool, a dunderhead. If there's a spark of understanding in me, I owe it to you alone.
>
> I shall never forget the moments, too few, alas, and too brief, when we are entirely one another's. You are my only love. I shall never love again; for a thousand memories of you would bar the way. Goodbye, I feel feverish, my forehead is throbbing, my eyes are going dim. Nothing shall ever separate us, promise me. Oh, when, when shall we be free? When shall we be able to live together, go abroad together? How I shall enjoy foreign lands! Think of travelling together, gathering our romantic first impressions and transmuting them into poems, while they are still fresh and fiery!
>
> I hate waiting. Write to me as soon as you possibly can. I want you to be sure and answer this before four, if you love me as I love you.
>
> My heart clasps your heart, as Petronius clasped his divine Eunice.
>
> *Vale et me ama!*
>
> *J.*

Daniel's reply followed on the next page:

> I feel that, were I to live alone beneath another sky, the utterly unique bond that links your soul and mine would somehow make me know what is becoming of you. And it seems to me that the lapse of time means nothing to our mutual affection.
>
> It is impossible to tell you the pleasure your letter gave me. You were my friend already and you've become far more than that—the better part of me. Have I not helped to shape your soul, as you have helped to shape mine? Good God, how real I feel that is when I'm writing to you! I am alive then! And everything in me is alive—body, mind, heart, imagination—thanks to your devotion, which never shall I doubt, my true and only friend.
>
> D.
>
> P.S. I've induced Mother to get rid of my old boneshaker. Good biz! It was falling to pieces.
>
> *Tibi*,
> D.

Another letter from Jacques:

> *O dilectissime*!
>
> How do you manage to be so cheerful at times and so sad at others? Personally, even in my moods of maddest gaiety, time and again I feel myself the prey of sombre thoughts. And I know that never, never again shall I be able to be gay, light-hearted. Always there will rise up before me the spectre of an unattainable ideal.
>
> Ah, sometimes I understand the ecstasy of those pale nuns with bloodless faces who spend their lives remote from this too, too real world! How pitiable to have wings if it is only to break them against prison bars! I am alone in a hostile universe; my father, whom I love, does not understand me. I am not so very old, but already how many fair flowers of hope lie broken, how many dews have turned to floods of rain, how many pleasures have been frustrated, what despairs have embittered my life!
>
> Forgive me, beloved, for being so lugubrious—I suppose my "character is being formed." My brain is in a ferment; my heart even more so, were that possible. Let us remain united for ever. Together we will steer clear of the rocks and reefs, and of the whirlpool men call pleasure.

Everything has turned to ashes in my hands; but there remains the supreme delight of knowing I am yours, and of our secret, O chosen of my heart!!

J.

P.S. I end this letter in great haste, as I have my recitation to learn by heart and I don't know a word of it yet, damn it!
O my love, if I didn't have you, I really think I'd kill myself!

Daniel had replied immediately:

So you are suffering?

Why should you, dearest of friends, why should you, who are so young, curse life? It's sacrilege! You say your soul is tethered to the earth. Well, then—work, hope, love, read books!

How can I console you for the sorrow that is preying on your soul? What remedy can I offer for your cries of despair? No, my friend, the Ideal is not incompatible with human nature. No, no, it is not a mere childish fancy, a phantom born of some poet's dream. For me the Ideal (it's hard to explain), for me it's the mingling of what is greatest with the humblest earthly things; it is to bring greatness into all one does; it is the complete development of all those divine faculties that the Creative Breath has instilled in us. Do you understand me? That is the Ideal as I feel it in the depths of my heart.

And then, if you will but trust a friend who is faithful unto death, who has lived much because he has dreamed and suffered so much; if you will trust your friend who has never wished anything but your happiness, let me remind you once again that you don't live for those who cannot understand you, for the outside world that despises you, poor boy, but for someone—that "someone" is I—who never ceases thinking of you, and feeling like you, with you, about all things.

O my friend, may the sweetness of our wonderful love be like a holy balm on your wounds.

D.

Instantly Jacques had scribbled in the margin:

Forgive me! It is the fault of my violent, extravagant, fantastical nature, dearest love!! I pass from the depths of despair to the most futile hopes; one moment I am in the abyss and the next carried aloft into the clouds! Am I then never to love anything continuously? (If it be not you!!) (And my Art!!!) Yes, such is my destiny—let me confess it … to you!

I adore you for your generosity, for your flower-like sensitiveness, for the earnestness you impart to all your thoughts, to all your actions, even to the delights of love. All your tender emotions I share with you, at the selfsame moment as you feel them. Let us thank Providence that we love each other and that our lonely, suffering hearts have been able to mingle thus, indissolubly, flesh to flesh!

Never forsake me.

And let us both remember eternally that each has in the other
the passionate object of
His Love

J.

There followed two long pages from Daniel, written in a bold, firm hand.

Tuesday, April 7.

My Friend,

Tomorrow I shall be fourteen. Last year I used to whisper to myself: "Fourteen!" It was like some lovely, impossible dream. Time passes and marks us. But in our depths nothing changes. We are always ourselves. Nothing has changed except that I feel weary and grown old.

Yesterday evening as I was going to bed I took up a volume of Musset. The last time I read it I began to tremble, at the first verse, and sometimes even wept. Yesterday for long sleepless hours I struggled to feel a thrill, but nothing came. I found the phrases well turned, harmonious… . Oh, what sacrilege!! Only at the end did the poetic emotion revive in me and, with a torrent of delicious tears, I felt that thrill.

Oh, if only my heart doesn't dry up! I so fear that life may blunt my heart and senses. I am growing old. Already those great ideas of God, the Spirit, Love, are ceasing to make my bosom throb as once they did, and at times I feel Doubt gnawing at my heart. How sad it all is! Why can't we live with all the might of our souls, instead of reasoning? *We think too much*! I envy the vitality of youth which blindly flings itself into every danger without taking thought. How I would love to sacrifice myself, with closed eyes, to a sublime Idea, to an ideal and immaculate Woman, instead of being always thrown back on myself. How dreadful they are, these longings which have no outlet!

You congratulate me on my earnestness. You are wrong; it is my curse, my evil destiny! I am not like the questing bee who goes to suck the honey from flower to flower. I am like the beetle that installs itself in the bosom of a single rose, in which it lives till the petals close about it and it dies suffocated in that last passionate embrace—the embrace of that one flower singled out from all the rest.

My devotion to you, my dear, is like that—faithful till death. You are that tender rose which, in the desolation of the earth, has opened its heart to me. In the depths of your loving heart bury my black despair!

D.

P.S. You can write to my house without danger during the Easter hols. My mother never interferes with my letters (not that they're anything very special!).

I have just finished Zola's *La Débâcle*. I can lend it to you. I haven't yet got over the emotions it produced. It has such wonderful power, such depth! I am going to begin *Werther*. There, my dear, we have at last the book of books. I have also taken Gyp's *Elle et Lui*, but I shall read *Werther* first.

D.

Jacques replied in a severe tone.

*For my friend's fourteenth birthday.*

In the universe there is a man who by day suffers unspeakable torments and who cannot sleep of nights, who feels in his heart an aching void that sensual pleasure cannot fill and in his head a fearful chaos of his faculties; who in the giddy whirl of pleasure, amongst his gay companions, feels, of a sudden, solitude with dark wings hovering above his heart. In the universe there is a man who hopes for nothing, and fears nothing, who loathes life and has not the strength to leave it; 'tis HE WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN GOD!!

P.S. Keep this. You will read it again when you are utterly forsaken and lift your voice in vain amid the darkness.

J.

"Have you been working during the hols.?" Daniel asked at the top of another page.
Jacques's answer followed:

I have just completed a poem in the same style as my "Harmodius and Aristogeiton." It begins rather neatly:

*Hail, Ccesar! Lo, the blue-eyed maid from Gaul*
*Dancing for thee the dance of her dear land,*
*Like a river-lotus 'neath the snowy flight of swans.*
*A shudder passes through her swaying form.*
*Hail, Emperor I … See the huge blade flash*
*In the fierce sword-dance of her far-off home… .*

And so on… . Here's the end:

*Caesar, thou growest pale! Alas, ah, thrice alas!*
*Her sword's jell point has pierced the lovely throat.*
*The cup falls jrom her hand, the blue eyes close,*
*All her white nakedness is red with blood,*
*Red in the pale light of the moon… .*
*Beside the great fire flaring on the lakeside*
*Ended is the dance*
*Of the white warrior maid at Caesar's feast.*

I call it "The Crimson Offering" and I have a mimed dance to go with it. I would like to dedicate it to the divine Loie Fuller, and for her to dance it at the Olympia. Do you think she'd do it?

Still, some days ago I took an irrevocable decision to return to the regular metres and rhymed verse of our great classics. (Really, I think I "despised" them because they are more difficult.) I have begun an ode in rhymed stanzas on the martyrdom I spoke to you about. This is the beginning:

*Ode to Father Perboyre, who died a martyr's death in*
*China, Nov. 20, 1839, and was beatified in fanuary 1889.*

*Hail, holy priest, at whose most cruel fate*
*All the world shuddered through its length and breadthl*
*Thee would I sing, to Heaven predestinate,*
*And faithful unto death.*

But since yesterday I have come to think that my true vocation will be to write, not poems, but stories and, if I have patience enough, novels. A great theme is fermenting in my mind. Listen!

A young girl, the daughter of a great artist, born in a studio and herself an artist (that's to say, rather unstable in character and finding her ideal not in family life but in the cult of Beauty), is loved by a sentimental but bourgeois young man, whom her exotic beauty fascinates. But their love changes to bitter hatred and they part. He then marries a harmless little provincial girl, while she, heartbroken for lost love, plunges into debauchery (or dedicates her genius to God—I don't yet know which). That's my idea; what does my friend think of it?

The great thing, you know, is to produce nothing that's artificial, but to follow one's bent. Given the instinct to create, one should regard oneself as having the noblest and finest of missions there can be, a great duty to fulfil. Yes, sincerity is all that matters. Sincerity in all things, always. Ah, how cruelly that thought torments me! A thousand times I have fancied I detected in myself that insincerity of the pseudo-artist, pseudo-genius, of which Maupassant discourses in Sur I'Eau. And my heart grew sick with disgust. O dearest, how I thank God that He has given you to me, and how greatly we shall need each other, so as to know ourselves truly and never fall into illusions about the nature of our genius!

I adore you and I clasp your hand passionately, as we did this morning, do you remember? With all my being, which is yours, wholeheartedly, passionately!

Take care! QQ has given us a dirty look. He can't understand that one may have noble thoughts and pass them on to one's friend—while he goes mumbling on over his Sallust!!

J.

Another letter, almost illegible, seemed to have been dashed down without a pause:

*Amicus amico.*

Too full, my heart is overflowing! What I can capture of the flood, I commit to paper.

Born to suffer, love, and hope, I hope and love and suffer! The tale of my life can be told in two lines: *What makes me live is love, and I have but one love, YOU!*

From my early youth I always felt a need to pour the emotions welling up in my heart into another, into an understanding heart. How many letters did I write in those days to an imaginary person who matched me like a brother! But, alas, it was only my own heart, carried away by its emotion, speaking, or, rather, writing to itself!! Then suddenly God willed that this Ideal should become Flesh, and it took form in You, my love! How did it begin? There is no telling; step by step, I lose myself in a maze of fancies, without ever tracing it to its origin. Could any one ever imagine anything so voluptuous, so sublime as our love?? I seek in vain for comparisons. Beside our great secret everything else turns pale! It's a sun that warms, enlightens our two lives. But no words can describe it. Written, it is like the photo of a flower.

That's enough!

Perhaps you are in need of help, of hope or consolation, and here I am sending you not words of affection but the sad effusions of a heart that lives only for itself. Forgive me, my love! I cannot write to you otherwise! I am going through a crisis, my heart is more parched than the stones of a dry watercourse. I am so unsure about everything, unsure of myself; can crueller suffering be??

Scorn me! Write to me no more! Go, love another!! No longer am I worthy of the gift you make me of yourself!

What irony is in this implacable destiny that urges me … to what goal? To nothingness!!!

Write to me. If you were lost to me, I should kill myself!

*Tibi eximo, carissime.*

J.

The Abbé Binot had slipped in between the last pages of the book a note intercepted by the teacher, on the eve of their flight. It consisted of an almost illegible pencilled note from Jacques.

On all who accuse basely and without proof, on all those persons, shame!

Shame to them! Woe to them!

Their machinations are prompted by vile curiosity, they want to nose out the secrets of our friendship. What a foul thing to do!

No sordid truckling to them! We must face out the storm together!

Death rather than defeat!

Our love is above calumny and threats! Let us prove it!

Yours For Life,
J.

# VII

THEY had reached Marseille on Sunday, after midnight. The first flush of their enthusiasm had waned. They had slept, doubled up, on the wooden seats of an ill-lighted carriage, and the noise of turntables and the sudden halt had waked them with a start. They had stepped onto the platform, blinking their eyes, dazed and apprehensive. The glamour had departed.

The first thing was to find somewhere to sleep. Opposite the station was a white globe of light inscribed "Hotel"; at the uninviting entrance the proprietor was on the watch for custom. Daniel, the more confident of the two, had boldly asked for two beds for the night. Mistrustful on principle, the man put them some questions. They had their story pat. At the Paris station their father had found he had forgotten a trunk, and had missed the train. He would be arriving in the morning, without a doubt, by the first train. The hotel-keeper hemmed and hawed, eyeing the youngsters. At last he opened a register.

"Write your names there."

He addressed Daniel not only because he seemed the older of the two—he looked sixteen—but even more because there was something distinguished in his looks and general demeanour that compelled a certain respect. On entering the hotel he had taken off his hat, not out of timidity but because he had a way of taking off his hat and letting his arm drop to his side—a gesture that seemed to imply: "It isn't specially for you I'm doing this, but because I believe in observing the customs of polite society." His dark hair came down to a neat point in the exact centre of his forehead, the skin of which was white as a young girl's. But there was nothing girlish in the firmly moulded chin, which, though quietly determined in its poise, had no suggestion of aggressiveness. His eyes had countered, without either weakness or bravado, the hotel-keeper's scrutiny, and he had written without hesitation in the register: "Georges and Maurice Legrand."

"The room will be seven francs. We always expect to be paid in advance. The night train gets in at 5:30. I'll see you're up in time for it."

They did not dare to tell him they were faint with hunger.

The furniture of the room consisted of two beds, a chair, and a basin. As they entered, a like shyness came over them both—they would have to undress in front of each other! All desire for sleep had fled. To postpone the awkward moment, they sat down on the beds and began checking up their resources. Their joint savings came to one hundred and eighty-eight francs, which they shared equally between them. Jacques, on emptying his pockets, produced a little Corsican dagger, an ocarina, a twenty-five-centime edition of Dante, and, last of all, a rather sticky slab of chocolate, half of which he gave to Daniel. Then they sat on, wondering what next to do. To gain time, Daniel unlaced his shoes; Jacques followed his example. A vague feeling of apprehension made them feel still more embarrassed. At last Daniel made a move.

"I'll blow out the candle," he said.

When he had done so, they hastily undressed and climbed into bed, without speaking.

Next morning, before five o'clock, someone started banging loudly on their door. Wraithlike in the pale light of the breaking day, they slipped into their clothes. The proprietor had made some coffee for them, but they refused it for fear of having to talk to him. Hungry and shivering, they visited the station bar.

By noon they had made a thorough exploration of Marseille. With freedom and the broad daylight, their daring had come back to them. Jacques invested in a note-book in which to record his impressions; now and then he stopped to jot down a phrase, the light of inspiration in his eye. They bought some bread and sausages and, going to the harbour, settled down on a coil of rope in front of stolid, stationary liners and dancing yachts and smacks.

A sailor told them to get up; he needed the cable they were sitting on—

Jacques risked a question. Where were those boats going?

"That depends. Which of em?"

"That big one."

"Her? She's off to Madagascar."

"Really? Shall we see her sail?"

"No, she ain't sailing till Thursday next. But if you want to see a liner going out, you'd best come back here this afternoon. The *La Fayette* there is sailing for Tunis at five."

At last they had the information they wanted.

Daniel, however, pointed out that Tunis was not Algeria.

"Anyhow it's Africa," Jacques said, biting off a mouthful of bread. Squatting against a heap of tarpaulins, with his shock of coarse red hair standing up, like a tuft of autumn grass, from his low forehead; with his angular head and protruding ears, his scraggy neck and queer-shaped little nose that kept on wrinkling, he brought to mind a squirrel nibbling beechnuts.

Daniel had stopped eating. He turned to Jacques.

"I say! Supposing we wrote to *them* from here, before we—!"

The glance the younger boy flashed at him cut him short.

"Are you mad?" he spluttered, his mouth half full of bread. "Just for them to have us arrested the moment we land?"

He scowled furiously at his friend. In the unprepossessing face, which a plentiful crop of freckles did nothing to improve, the blue, harsh, deep-set, imperious eyes had a curiously vivid sheen. Their expression changed so constantly as to make them seem inscrutable. Now earnest, and a moment later gay and mocking; now soft and almost coaxing, they would suddenly go hostile, almost cruel. And then, unexpectedly, they would grow dim with tears; though oftenest they were shrewd and ardent, seemingly incapable of gentleness.

On the brink of a retort Daniel checked himself. His face expressed a meek submission to Jacques's outburst and, as if to excuse his last remark, he smiled. He had a special way of smiling: the small, pursed mouth would suddenly open on the left, showing his teeth, in a quaint, twisted grin that lent a charming air of gaiety to the pensive face.

On such occasions it seemed odd that the tall, mature-minded youngster did not rebel against the ascendancy of his childish friend. His education and experience, the liberty he had enjoyed, gave him an uncontestable advantage over Jacques. Not to mention that at the lycée where they had met Daniel had proved a good pupil, Jacques a slow-coach. Daniel's nimble wits were always ahead of any demand that was made on them; Jacques, on the other hand, was a poor worker, or rather did not work at all. It was not that his intelligence was at fault. The trouble was that it was directed towards matters that had no connexion with his studies. Some demon of caprice was always prompting him to do the most ridiculous things. He had never been able to resist temptation and seemed quite irresponsible, seemed to follow only the promptings of that inner voice. But the oddest thing was that, though he was at the bottom of his class in most subjects, his fellow-pupils and even the masters could not help feeling a certain interest in him. Among the other youngsters, whose personalities were kept in somnolent abeyance by habit and discipline, among the sedulous masters, whose natural gifts seemed to have gone stale on them, this dunce with the unpromising face but given to outbursts of sudden candour and caprice, who seemed to live in a world of daydreams created by and for himself alone, who launched without a second thought into the most preposterous adventures—this odd little creature, while he thoroughly dismayed them, compelled their tacit admiration.

Daniel had been among the first to feel the attraction of Jacques's mind, less developed than his own but so fertile, so lavish of surprises, and so remarkably instructive. Moreover, he too had in him a strain of waywardness, a like inclination towards independence and revolt. As for Jacques, a day-boarder in a Catholic school, the offspring of a family in which religious exercises bulked so largely—it had been for the sheer excitement of another evasion from the narrow life at home that he had gone out of his way to attract the Protestant boy's attention; for even then Jacques had guessed that Daniel would reveal to him a world far different from his own. But in a few weeks their their comradeship had blazed up into an all-absorbing passion, and in it both had found a welcome relief from the moral solitude from which the two, unconsciously, had been 'suffering so long. It was a chaste, almost a mystical love, in which the two young souls fused their common yearnings towards the future, and shared all the extravagant and contradictory feelings that can obsess the mind of a fourteen-year-old boy—from a passion for silkworms or secret codes to the most intimate heart-searchings, even to that feverish desire for Life which seemed to intensify with every day they lived through.

Daniel's silent smile had calmed Jacques, and now he was munching away again at his bread. The lower part of his face was rather gross: he had the characteristic Thibault jaw, and an over-large mouth, with chapped, lips. But, though ugly, the mouth was expressive and suggested a strong-willed, sensual nature.

He looked up at his friend. "You'll see, I know the ropes!" he boasted. "Life's easy in Tunis. Anybody who applies is taken on for the rice-fields. You can chew betel—it's delicious. You earn wages right away, and you get all the grub you want—dates and tangerines and so on … and, of course, lots of travelling."

"We'll write to them from there," Daniel suggested.

"Perhaps," Jacques corrected, with a toss of his red poll. "Once we've found our feet and they realize we can get on without them."

They fell silent. Daniel had finished his meal and was gazing at the big black hulls, the busy scene on the sunlit wharves, and the luminous horizon glimpsed through a forest of masts. He was struggling against himself, trying to fix his mind on what he saw, so as not to think about his mother.

The main thing was somehow to get on board the *La Fayette* that evening.

A waiter pointed out to them the offices of the Messageries Line. The fares were posted up. Daniel went to the ticket-office window.

"Please, my father has sent me to get two third-class passages to Tunis."

"Your father?" The old clerk went on placidly with his work. All that could be seen of him was the top of his forehead, rising above a pile of papers. He continued writing for a while. Then, without looking up, he said to Daniel: "Very well, go and tell him to come here himself— and to bring his identification papers with him, don't forget!"

They grew aware that the other people in the office were staring at them, and fled without another word. Jacques, who was boiling with rage, thrust his hands deep into his pockets. His imagination was suggesting to him a series of expedients. They might get taken on as cabin-boys, or as cargo—in crates well stocked with food; or hire a row-boat and go by easy stages along the coast to Gibraltar and thence to Morocco, halting each night at a port where they would play the ocarina and pass the hat round on the terraces of the little inns:

Daniel was pondering; that inner voice had once again made itself heard, warning him. He had heard it thus several times since they had run away. But this time he could no longer turn a deaf ear; he had to take heed of it. And there was no mistaking the disapproval manifest in that still small voice.

"Why not lie low in Marseille for a bit?" he suggested.

"We'd be spotted before two days were out," Jacques retorted scornfully. "Oh, yes, you can be sure the hunt is up already; they're on our tracks all right"

Daniel pictured the scene at home: his mother's anxiety as she plied Jenny with questions, and, after that, her visit to the principal to ask if he knew anything about her son.

"Listen," he said. He was breathing with an effort. Then he noticed a bench near by and made Jacques sit beside him. Taking his courage in both hands, he went on: "Now or never, we've got to think things out. After all, when they've hunted for us high and low for two or three days, don't you think they'll have been punished enough?"

Jacques clenched his fists. "No, I tell you! No!" he shouted. "Have you forgotten everything so soon?" Such was the nervous tension of his body that he was no longer sitting on the bench, but lying propped against it, stiff as a board. His eyes were aflame with rage against the school, the Abbé, the lycée, the principal, his father, society, the world's injustice. "Anyhow they'll never believe us!" he cried. His voice went hoarse. "They've stolen our grey letter-book. They don't understand and they can't understand! If you'd seen the priest, the way he tried to make me confess things! His Jesuit tricks, of course. Just because you're a Protestant, he said, there's nothing you wouldn't do, nothing …!"

Shame made him turn away. Daniel's eyes dropped and a pang of grief shot through his heart at the hideous thought that their foul suspicions might have been imparted to his mother.

"Do you think they'll tell Mother?" he muttered.

But Jacques was not listening.

"No!" he exclaimed again. "No, I won't hear of it. You know what we agreed on. Nothing's changed. We've gone through enough persecution. Goodbye to all that! When we've proved by deeds the stuff we're made of, and that we don't need them, you'll see how they'll respect us. There's only one thing to do, and that's to go abroad and earn our living without them. After that, yes, then we can write and say where we are, and state our terms, and tell them we intend to remain friends, and be free, because our friendship is for life and for death!" He stopped, steadied his nerves, and went on in a normal tone. "Otherwise, as I've told you, I shall kill myself."

Daniel gazed at him with a scared expression. The small pale face, mottled with yellow blotches, had a look of deadly earnest, exempt from any bravado.

"I swear to you," Jacques continued, "that I'm quite determined not to fall into their clutches again. Before that happens I'll have shown them what I am. Either we win our freedom or—see that?" Raising the edge of his waistcoat, he let Daniel see the handle of the Corsican dagger that he had filched, on the Sunday morning, from his brother's room. "Or this might be better." He drew from his pocket a small bottle done up in paper. "If you dared to refuse, now, to embark with me, I'd … I'd make short work of it. Like this!" He made the gesture of drinking off the bottle. "And I'd drop down dead."

"What … what is it?" Daniel murmured, terrified.

"Tincture of iodine," Jacques replied, still watching Daniel's face.

"Look here, Thibault! Do please give me that bottle!" Daniel pleaded.

Horrified though he was, he felt a thrill of love and admiration; once more he was carried away by his friend's extraordinary charm. And again the project of adventure tempted him. Meanwhile Jacques had put the bottle back in his pocket.

"Let's walk," he said, scowling at Daniel. "One can't think properly sitting down."

At four o'clock they were back at the quay. The *La Fayette* was the focus of an animated scene. A steady stream of dock-hands, with crates and boxes on their shoulders—like ants rescuing their eggs— was passing along the gangplanks. The two boys, Jacques in front, followed them. On the freshly scrubbed deck sailors were operating a winch above a yawning gulf, lowering baggage and cargo into the hold. A small, sturdy man with a beaked nose, hairy black hands and cheeks, and a smooth pink skin, was directing operations. He was wearing a blue jacket with gold braid on the sleeves.

At the last moment Jacques backed out.

"Excuse me, sir," Daniel began, slowly removing his hat, "are you the captain?"

"Why do you want to know that?" the man inquired with a laugh.

"I've come with my brother, sir. We'd like to ask you …" Even before the end of the phrase Daniel was conscious he had taken a wrong line, that he had bungled it beyond redress. "… to—er—take us to Tunis on your ship."

"All alone like that, eh?" the man asked with a sort of leer. There was something in his bloodshot eyes—a glint of unsavoury effrontery, almost maniacal—that suggested more than the words conveyed.

Daniel realized that there was nothing for it but to go on with their preconcerted story.

"We came to Marseille to join our father; he's been given a job in Tunis, on a rice-farm, and—er—he has written to us to join him there. We have the money for our fares." That improvised addition to their story, he realized, once he had made it, sounded as lame as all the rest.

"Right. Who are you staying with at Marseille just now?"

"With … with nobody. We've only just come from the station."

"You don't know any one at Marseille?"

"N-no."

"And so you want to come on board today?"

Daniel was on the point of answering no and bolting without more ado. But he answered feebly:

"Well, yes, sir."

"See here, my young beauties," the sailor grinned, "you're mighty lucky the Old Man didn't find you here. He don't have much time for jokers like you, that he don't, and he'd have clapped you into irons and sent you off to the police, just to find out what your little game may be. And, now I think of it, I'm damned if that ain't the best thing to do with little scallawags like you!" he suddenly roared, catching Daniel by the sleeve. "Hi there, Chariot! You nab the little chap, while I …"

But Jacques, who had seen his gesture, took a wild leap over the packing-cases, dodged Chariot's outstretched arm with a wriggle, and was at the gangway in three strides. Slipping like a monkey between the dockers coming up it, he jumped onto the quay, turned left, and started bolting for dear life. Then suddenly he remembered Daniel, and looked back. Yes, Daniel was escaping, too. Jacques watched him thread his way between the ant-like file of dock-hands, dash off the gangway, and swerve to the right, while the supposed captain, leaning on the bulwarks, roared with laughter at their panic. Jacques started running again. He and Daniel could meet later; for the moment the thing to do was to hide among the crowd and to get away, to get away at all costs!

A quarter of an hour later, out of breath, in a deserted street on the outskirts of the city, he stopped. At first he felt a cruel glee in fancying Daniel had been caught. If he had been, he deserved it. Wasn't it his fault their plans had come to grief? He hated him now and was half inclined to make off into the country and carry on the escapade alone, without bothering about Daniel. He bought cigarettes and began smoking. However, after making a long detour through a modern quarter of the town, he found himself back at the quayside. The *La Fayette* was still there. From where he was he could just see the three decks lined with people, packed like sardines; the liner was getting under way. He ground his teeth and turned on his heel.

Then he began to look for Daniel, feeling he must vent his anger on somebody. After wandering through various streets, he entered the Cannebiere, followed the stream of loiterers for a time, then turned on his tracks. The air was oppressive; a storm was brewing. Jacques was bathed in sweat. How was he to find Daniel among all those people? His desire to get in touch with his companion became more and more insistent, as his hopelessness of doing so increased. His lips, parched by the unaccustomed cigarettes and the fever in his blood, were burning.

Without caring whether he attracted attention, or troubling about a distant growl of thunder, he started running desperately along the streets, peering in all directions till his eyes ached. Then a sudden change came over the city. The facades of the buildings stood out pale against a livid sky and a grey light seemed rising from the cobbles. The storm was rapidly approaching. Great drops of rain began to star the pavement. A violent clap of thunder, close at hand, set him trembling. He was walking past some steps, beneath a pillared entrance which he discovered was the porch of a church. The door was open; he ran in.

His steps echoed under the high roof and a familiar scent assailed his nostrils. Immediately he felt a vast relief, a sense of security. He was no longer alone; the presence of God was round him, sheltering him. But at the same moment a new fear gripped him. Since leaving home he had not once thought of God. And suddenly he felt hovering above him the unseen Eye that sees and penetrates the most secret places of the heart. He knew himself for a miserable sinner whose profanation of this holy place might well bring down on him God's vengeance. Rain gushed down the roof, violent flashes lit up the windows of the apse, the thunder roared incessantly, echoing round him as he cowered in the incense-laden darkness; almost he fancied that the fires of heaven were seeking out the offender! Kneeling at a *priedieu*, Jacques humbled himself before the altar, with bowed head, and hastily recited a paternoster and some aves.

At last the crashes began to space out; a spectral light glimmered across the stained-glass windows: the storm was passing. All immediate danger was over. He had a feeling that he had cheated, had eluded just reprisals. Deep down in him the sense of guilt persisted, but tempered by a thrill of perverse arrogance at having escaped the hand of justice. And, though he had qualms about it, it gave him a certain pleasure. Night was closing in. Why was he lingering here? With the passing of his fear a curious apathy had come over him and, staring at the wavering candle-flames upon the altar, he was conscious of a vague feeling of dissatisfaction, almost of resentment, as though the church had been secularized. A sacristan came to close the doors. He fled like a thief, without the merest apology for a prayer, without a genuflexion. He knew well that he was not taking away with him God's pardon.

A brisk wind was drying up the pavements. Few people were about. Jacques began to wonder where Daniel might be. He pictured the mishaps that might have befallen him and his eyes filled with tears, blurring the road ahead. He tried to keep them back by walking more quickly. At that moment had he seen Daniel crossing the street and coming towards him, he would have swooned with joy and affection for his friend.

A clock struck eight. Windows were lighting up. Feeling hungry, he bought some bread, then continued walking straight before him, haunted by his despair, without so much as troubling to scrutinize the people he encountered.

Two hours later, thoroughly fagged out, he noticed a seat under some trees in a deserted avenue. He sat down. From the branches of a plane-tree heavy drops fell on his head. … A peremptory hand was shaking his shoulder. He realized he must have fallen asleep. He saw a policeman examining him, and felt like fainting; his legs seemed giving way beneath him.

"Get home now, my lad; and look sharp about it!"

Jacques fled into the darkness. He had ceased wondering about Daniel, had ceased thinking about anything. His feet were sore. Whenever he saw a policeman he slunk out of his sight. He made his way back to the harbour. Midnight was striking. The wind had fallen; coloured lights, two by two, were dancing on the water. The wharf was deserted. He all but fell over the legs of a beggar snoring in a nook between two bales. Stronger than his fears, there came on him an irresistible desire to lie down, to sleep, no matter where, at all costs. He took a few steps, lifted the corner of a big tarpaulin, stumbled over boxes smelling of sodden wood, fell down, and was asleep at once.

Meanwhile Daniel was hunting high and low for Jacques. He had roamed round the station, round the hotel where they had slept and the offices of the shipping company; all in vain. He went back to the harbour. The *La Fayette's* berth was empty, the port seemed dead; the storm was sending the loiterers home.

With lowered head he started back to the centre of town, the rain beating on his shoulders. After buying some food for Jacques and himself he took a seat at the cafe which they had visited in the morning. It was coming down in torrents in this part of the city. At every window the sun-blinds were being hauled in and the waiters at the cafe, with napkins on their heads, were rolling up the large awnings above the terraces. Trams sped past, their trolleys flashing vivid sparks along the wires against the leaden sky, their wheels cutting like ploughshares through the torrent on the road and throwing the water up on either side. Daniel's feet were sopping, his temples throbbing. What could have become of Jacques? Even more painful to him than the fact that he had lost touch with the younger boy was the thought of his anxiety and distress, all alone. He told himself that he would catch sight of him just over there, at that corner by the bakery, and watched intently. With his mind's eye he pictured Jacques trudging through the puddles, his face ghastly white and his eyes desperately hunting for his friend in every direction. Time and time again he was on the point of calling out —but it was not Jacques, only an unknown little boy dashing into the baker's and emerging with a loaf tucked under his coat.

Two hours passed. The rain had stopped and darkness was falling. Daniel dared not go; he felt sure Jacques would turn up the moment he left the place where he was waiting. At last he made a move, towards the station. The white globe above the door of their hotel was lit up. It was a badly lighted neighbourhood; would they be able to recognize each other, he wondered, if they met in this obscurity?

A voice cried: "Mummy!" He saw a boy of his own age crossing the street and joining a lady, who kissed him. She had opened her umbrella to protect herself from the drips off the roofs. Her son linked his arm with hers; affectionately talking, they disappeared into the darkness. An engine whistled. Daniel felt too exhausted to fight down his depression.

Ah, what a fool he had been to follow Jacques! Only too well he knew it now; indeed, he had been conscious of it all the time, from the very start, since their early morning meeting at the Luxembourg, when they had decided on the mad adventure. No, never for a moment had he been able to shake off the idea that if, instead of running away, he had hastened to explain things to his mother, far from reproaching him she would have shielded him from everything and everybody, and no harm would have come to him. Why had he given way? He simply could not understand what had possessed him to act as he had done.

He saw himself again, that Sunday morning, in the hall. Jenny, hearing his footsteps, had run up to him. On the tray had lain a yellow envelope with the lycée stamp—announcing his expulsion, he assumed. He had hidden it under the tablecloth. Silently Jenny had gazed at him with her keen eyes; she had guessed that some alarming event had happened, and followed him to his room. She had seen him pick up the wallet in which he kept his savings. Then she had thrown herself on him and clasped him in her arms,

kissing him, holding him so tightly that he could hardly breathe. “What’s the matter? What are you going to do?” He had confessed that he was running away, that he was in trouble at school, he was falsely accused and all the masters were leagued against him; that it was essential he should disappear for a few days. “Alone?” she had asked. No, he was going with a friend. “Who is it?” Thibault. “Take me with you!” He had drawn her to him as he had used to do when they were little, and had asked in a low voice: “What about Mother?” She had burst into tears. Then he had said: “Don’t be afraid, and don’t believe anything they may say. In a few days I’ll write, and I shall come back. But swear to me, swear that you will never tell Mother, or anyone else—never, never—that I came home and you saw me and you knew I was going away.” She had given a quick nod. Then he had tried to kiss her, but she had run off to her bedroom, sobbing bitterly. Her last cry of utter, heartrending despair still rang in his ears… . He stepped out more briskly.

Walking straight ahead, without looking where he was going, he soon found himself at some distance from the city, in the suburbs. The pavements were deep in slush, and street-lamps few and far between. Black gulfs of darkness yawned on either side: the entrances of yards and evil-smelling alleys. Children swarmed in the squalid tenement-houses, and in a sordid tavern a gramophone was grinding away. Turning, he walked for some time in the opposite direction. And now he realized that he was dead-tired. A lighted clock-tower showed up, and he knew that he was back at the station. The hands marked one. A long night lay before him; what was he to do? He looked round for some place where he could stop and take breath. A gas-lamp was burning at the entrance of a blind alley; crossing the tract of light, he crouched down in the darkness. A high factory wall rose on his left; resting his back against it, he closed his eyes.

A woman’s voice woke him with a start. “You don’t propose sleeping there all night, do you? Where do you live?”

She led him out under the light. He stared at her, tongue-tied.

“I can see,” she went on. “You’ve had a row with your dad, and you daren’t go back home. That’s it, eh?”

Her voice was gentle. He saw no need to undeceive her.

“Yes, Madame,” he said politely, hat in hand.

“ ‘Yes, Madame’!” She laughed. “That’s good! Well, well, you’ll have to go back home; there’s no two ways about it. I’ve been through it myself, and I *know*. And, as you’ll have to do it, what’s the use of waiting? The more you put it off, the worse it is.” Puzzled by his silence, she asked in a lower voice: “Are you afraid of getting a hiding from your dad?” Her manner of asking it was that of a fellow-conspirator, friendly but inquisitive.

He still said nothing.

“Ain’t he a card!” she laughed. “And that pig-headed he’d rather spend the night out in the street! Oh, well, come along then. There’s no one at my place and I can give you a mattress on the floor. I couldn’t bring myself to leave a poor kid out all night in the street.”

She looked decent enough, but he felt a vast relief at having someone to talk to at last. He would have liked to say: “Thank you, Madame,” but he said nothing, and followed her.

They came to a low door. She rang the bell but the door was long in opening. The hall smelt of washing. He stumbled against the bottom step of a flight of stairs.

“I’ll lead the way,” she said. “Give me your hand.”

The lady’s hand was gloved and warm. He followed her meekly. The air, too, was warm inside the house. Daniel was glad to be no longer out of doors. They went up several flights of stairs; then she produced a key, opened a door, and lit a lamp. He saw an untidy room, an unmade bed. He remained standing, blinking in the sudden light, worn out and half asleep. Without waiting to take off her hat, she pulled a mattress off the bed and dragged it into another room. Turning, she began laughing again.

“Why, he’s half asleep already, poor kid… . Look here, you’d better take your shoes off, anyhow.”

He complied, with nerveless hands. His project of returning next morning to the station buffet, at exactly five, in the hope that Jacques might have the same idea, was haunting him like an obsession.

“Would you please wake me very early?”

“Don’t you worry! I’ll see you’re up in time,” she laughed.

He vaguely felt her helping him to take off his tie and undress. Then he dropped like a log onto the mattress, and lost consciousness at once… .

When Daniel opened his eyes, it was already day. He thought at first that he was in his bedroom at home. Then he was struck by the colour of the light filtering through the curtains. A young voice was singing in the next room, the door of which was open. Then he remembered.

Glancing into the room, he saw a little girl (or so she seemed) washing her face over a basin. Turning, she saw him lying on the mattress, propped up on an elbow.

“Ah, so you’re awake. Good for you!” she laughed.

Could this be the lady of the night before? In a chemise and short skirt, her arms and legs bare, she looked like a child. Now that she was not wearing a hat he noticed that she had short brown hair, cut like a boy’s and brushed vigorously back.

Suddenly a memory of Jacques appalled him.

“Good heavens, and I’d meant to be at the buffet first thing!”

But the warmth of the blankets she had tucked round him while he was asleep made him disinclined to move. And anyhow he did not dare to get up while the door stood open. Just then she came in, carrying a steaming cup and a hunk of buttered bread.

“Look here! Get your teeth into this, and then clear off. I don’t want to have your pa coming round and making trouble for me.”

He felt embarrassed at being seen by her half dressed, in his shirt and with his collar open, and even more embarrassed at seeing her come towards him, for her neck, too, was bare and so were her shoulders. She bent towards him. Lowering his eyes, he took the cup and, to hide his bashfulness, began to eat the bread and butter. Shuffling her slippers and singing, she moved from one room to the other. He dared not lift his eyes from the cup, but, when she passed close by, he could not help noticing her naked, slender, blue-veined legs almost level with his eyes and, gliding above the deal floor, her reddened heels emerging from the slippers. The bread stuck in his throat. He felt unnerved, incapable of facing this new day, big with unpredictable events. It flashed across his mind that at home, at the breakfast table, his chair was empty.

A sudden burst of sunlight flooded the room; the girl had just thrown the shutters open, and her young voice trilled in the bright air like bird-song.

*"Ah, si I'amour prenait racine*
*J'en planterais dans mon jardin!"*

His self-control gave way. The sunshine, her careless joy—at the very moment when he was fighting down his despair! His eyes filled with tears.

"Come along! Hurry up!" she cried gaily, picking up his empty cup.

Then she saw he was crying.

"Feeling low?" she asked.

She had a kind, big-sisterly voice; he could not keep back a sob. She sat down on the edge of the mattress, slipped her arm round his neck, and, with a mothering gesture of consolation—the final argument of women all the world over—pillowed his head upon her breast. He dared not make the slightest movement; he could feel, through her chemise, the rise and fall of her breast, and its soft warmth against his cheeks. He felt his breath failing him.

"You silly boy!" Drawing back, she hid her breast with her bare arm. "It's seeing that, is it, that makes you go all funny! Why, I'd never have believed it of you—at your age! By the by, how old are you?"

The lie came out automatically after his practice during the past two days.

"Sixteen."

"Sixteen?" She sounded surprised.

She had taken his hand and was examining it absent-mindedly. Pushing back the sleeve, she uncovered his arm.

"My word, the kid's skin is as white as a girl's," she smiled.

She had raised the boy's wrist and was fondling his hand with her cheek. The smile died from her face. Taking a deep breath, she dropped his hand. Before he realized what she was doing, she had unfastened her skirt.

"I'm cold. Warm me up!" she whispered, slipping between the blankets.

Jacques had slept badly under the tarpaulin stiffened by the cold rain. Before dawn he had crept from his hiding-place and begun to wander aimlessly in the dim light of daybreak. "It's certain," he mused, "that if Daniel's free, he'll have the idea of going to the station buffet as we did yesterday." He was there, himself, before five o'clock. At six he still could not make up his mind where to go.

What was he to think? What should he do? He ascertained where the prison was. Sick at heart, he hardly dared to raise his eyes to the closed entrance-gate: CITY JAIL.

There, perhaps, Daniel … He dared not complete the thought. He walked all round the endless wall, stepped back to judge the height of the barred windows; then, seized with sudden fear, he fled.

All that morning he scoured the town. The sun was blazing hot and the bright colours of the linen hanging out to dry made the crowded streets seem gay with bunting. On doorsteps gossips laughed and chattered in acrimonious tones. The sights of the street, its freedom and adventurous possibilities, gave him a brief exhilaration. But at once his thoughts harked back to Daniel. He held the bottle of iodine clutched in his hand, deep down in his pocket; if he did not find Daniel before night, he would kill himself. He swore it, raising his voice a little to bind himself more strongly; inwardly he wondered if he would have the necessary courage.

It was not till nearly eleven, when he was passing for the hundredth time in front of the cafe where, the evening before, they had asked the way to the shipping office, that—yes, there he was!

Jacques charged down on him between the tables and chairs lining the terrace. Daniel, more self-controlled, had risen.

"Steady there!"

People were staring at them. They shook hands, Daniel paid, and, leaving the cafe, they turned down the nearest side-street. Then Jacques clutched his friend's arm and, clinging to him, hugged him passionately. Suddenly he began to sob, his forehead pressed to Daniel's shoulder. Daniel was not crying, but he was very pale. He walked steadily on, his gaze untender and focused far ahead, but he was pressing Jacques's small hand to his side. His upper lip, drawn back across his teeth on one side of his mouth, was trembling.

Jacques described his adventures. "Just think, I slept on the quay like a thief, under a tarpaulin! What about you?"

Daniel was embarrassed. His respect for his friend and for their friendship was immense; yet now, for the first time, he was bound to conceal something from Jacques, something of vital importance. The enormity of the secret that had come between them overpowered him. He was on the point of letting himself go, of telling everything; but no, he could not. He remained ill at ease and tongue-tied, unable to expel the haunting memory of all that had befallen him.

"What about you?" Jacques repeated. "Where did you spend the night?"

Daniel made a vague gesture. "On a seat, over there. But most of the time I just mooned about."

After a meal, they talked things over. To stay in Marseille would be imprudent: their movements would be bound to arouse suspicion, sooner or later.

"In that case …?" Daniel murmured tentatively.

"In that case," Jacques replied, "I know what to do. We must go to Toulon. It's only ten or twenty miles from here, over there on the left, along the coast. We'll go on foot; they'll think we're schoolboys out for a walk. At Toulon there ,are any number of boats, and we'll manage somehow or other to get on board one."

While he spoke, Daniel could not take his eyes off the loved face that he had found again, the freckled cheeks, the frail, almost transparent ears, and the blue eyes in which seemed to come and go pictures of the things he was describing: Toulon and ships and the vast horizons of the sea. But, however great his desire to share Jacques's fine tenacity of purpose, his common sense made him sceptical; he felt sure they would never set out on that voyage… . And yet was it really so impossible? At times almost he hoped he was wrong, that dreams might prove truer than common sense.

They bought some food and started for Toulon. Two women of the town stared at them, and smiled. Daniel blushed; their skirts no longer hid from him the secrets of their bodies. Fortunately Jacques was whistling, and noticed nothing. Daniel felt that that

experience, the mere memory of which made his heart beat faster, would be from now on a barrier between them. Jacques could never now be his friend in the fullest sense; he was only a "kid."

After passing through the suburbs they reached at last a road ribboning the windings of the coast like a line traced in pink chalk along the seashore. A light breeze met them, with a tang that had an aftertaste of brine. Their shoulders scorched by the sun, they trudged through the white dust. The nearness of the sea intoxicated them; they left the road and ran to it, crying: "*Thalassa! Thalassa!*" and reaching eager hands towards the sparkling blue waves. But the sea proved less easy of access than they had hoped. At the point where they approached it, the shore did not shelve down to the water's edge along the reach of golden sand their eagerness had pictured. It overhung a deep gulf of equal width throughout, in which the sea was breaking over dark, jagged rocks. Immediately below them a mass of tumbled boulders projected like a Cyclopean breakwater; waves were charging furiously against the granite ledges only to slip back in impotent confusion, foam-flecked, along the smooth, steep flanks. They had joined hands and, bending over the abyss, forgot everything in contemplation of the seething eddies faceted with broken lights. And in their wordless ecstasy there was a certain awe.

"Look!" Daniel said.

A few hundred yards out a boat, a miracle of dazzling whiteness, was gliding over the dark blue expanse. The hull was painted green beneath the water-line, the bright green of a young leaf, and the boat was moving forward to a strong rhythm of oars that lifted the bows clean out of the water and with each stroke displayed a streaming glint of green, vivid as an electric spark.

"Ah, if only one could describe all that!" Jacques murmured, crushing the note-book in his pocket between his fingers. "But you'll see!" he cried, with a jerk of his shoulders. "Africa is even more lovely! Come along!"

He dashed back, between the rocks, onto the road. Daniel ran beside him, and for the moment his heart was care-free, emptied of regret, all eagerness for adventure.

They came to a place where the road climbed and turned off at a right angle, to reach a group of houses. Just when they came to the bend, a terrific uproar made them stop abruptly; they saw charging down at break-neck speed towards them, zigzagging across the road, what seemed to be a confused mass of horses, wheels, and barrels. Before they could make a movement to get out of the way, it had crashed, fifty yards off, against an iron railing. A large, heavily laden dray, coming down the slope, had not been braked in time. The momentum of its downward rush had swept the four horses drawing it off their feet and, rearing, struggling, tripping over one another, they had fallen at the turn. Wine was gushing out onto the road and a crowd of excited men, shouting and swearing and waving their arms, was gathering round a hideous, inextricable tangle of bleeding nostrils, hoofs, and cruppers floundering in the dust. Suddenly across the thuds of steel-shod hoofs against the iron apron, the clank of chains, jangling bells, the neighing of the other horses, and the imprecations of the drivers, there sounded a hoarse, grating cough that dominated all the other sounds. It was the death-rattle of the leader, a grey horse on. which the others were trampling and which, its legs pinned under him, was suffocating, strangled by the harness. A man dashed in amongst the maddened horses, brandishing an axe. They saw him stumble, fall, and rise again; now he was holding the grey horse by an ear and desperately hacking at his collar. But the collar was of iron and he merely dented the edge of his axe upon it. The man drew himself up, his features convulsed with helpless rage, and flung the axe against the wall, while the rattle rose to a strident gasping that grew shriller and shriller, and a stream of blood gushed from the dying horse's nostrils.

Jacques felt the world reeling around him. He tried to grasp Daniel's sleeve, but his fingers went stiff and his nerveless legs gave way under him. People gathered round the boys; Jacques was helped to a seat in a little garden, beside a pump, and a kindly soul began bathing his forehead with cold water. Daniel was as pale as he.

When they returned to the road, the whole village was busy with the barrels. The horses had been extricated. Of the four only one had escaped unscathed; two, their forelegs broken, were kneeling on the road. The fourth was dead and lay sprawling in the ditch into which the wine was flowing, his grey head pressed to the earth, his tongue lolling, his glazed eyes half shut, and his legs neatly doubled up beneath him—as if, before dying, he had tried to make himself as portable as could be for the knacker. The utter stillness of the shaggy grey bulk, smeared with blood and wine and road-dust, was in striking contrast with the heaving flanks of the other horses, standing or kneeling, unheeded, in the middle of the road.

They watched one of the truckmen go up to the dead horse. The old, weathered face with the sweat-matted hair was convulsed with rage yet had a certain gravity ennobling it and proving how much he took to heart the disaster. Jacques could not take his eyes off him. He watched him place between his lips a cigarette he had been holding, then bend over the fallen horse and feel the swollen tongue already black with flies, and insert his finger in the mouth, baring the yellow teeth. He remained for a few moments, stooping, running his fingers over the mottled gums. Then he straightened himself up and sought some friendly eye. His gaze met that of the two boys and, without troubling to wipe his hands, smeared with sticky froth in which flies were crawling, he replaced the cigarette between his lips.

"He wasn't seven, that poor horse," he said with an angry jerk of his shoulders. Then he turned to Jacques. "The best one of the team, he was, the hardest worker of the lot. I'd give two of my fingers, these two, to have him back." He looked away, a wry smile screwing up his lips, and spat.

The boys began to walk away, and now their gaiety had given place to a profound dejection.

"Have you ever seen a real corpse, a human being's, I mean?" Jacques suddenly inquired.

"No."

"You've no idea, Daniel, how strange it looks. … I'd been thinking about it for a longish while; then one Sunday, at catechism time, I rushed off there."

"Where?"

"To the Morgue."

"What? By yourself?"

"Of course. You simply can't imagine, Daniel, how pale a corpse can be. Just like wax, or plaster of Paris. There were two corpses there that day. One had its face all gashed about, but the other looked almost alive… . Yes, it looked alive," he repeated, "but at the very first glance you couldn't help knowing the man was dead. There was something about him—oh, I don't know what. You saw that

horse just now; well, it was just the same thing… . One day, when we're free," he added, "some Sunday, you must come there with me, to the Morgue."

Daniel had ceased to listen. They had just passed below the balcony of a house from which there came the tinkle of a piano: a child was playing scales. Jenny! And suddenly there rose before him Jenny's delicately moulded features, the expression of her face when she had cried to him: "What are you going to do?" while the tears welled up in her grey eyes, large with wonder.

"Aren't you sorry you haven't got a sister?" he asked after a while.

"Yes, I am! An elder sister's what I'd like. I have a—a sort of little sister." Seeing Daniel's puzzled look, he added: "Mademoiselle is bringing up at home a little niece of hers, an orphan. Gise is ten. Her name's Gisèle, but we call her Gise for short. She's just lik little sister to me."

Suddenly his eyes grew moist. Then his thoughts took a new turn. "You, of course, were brought up in a quite different way. For one thing, you're an ordinary day-boy, you're almost free, you have much the same life as Antoine… . But, then, you're such a sensible chap— that makes all the difference." There was a hint of regret in his tone.

"Meaning—you're *not* a sensible chap?" There was no irony in Daniel's tone.

"I 'sensible'!" Jacques's eyebrows puckered. "Don't I know that I'm … unbearable! And there's nothing to be done about it. Sometimes I have fits of rage, you know, when I lose my grip on things completely—I storm about and break things, I shout most horrible words; when I'd be quite capable of jumping out of a window or knocking somebody down. I'd rather you knew everything about me, that's why I'm telling you all this." It was evident that he took a morose pleasure in accusing himself. "I don't know if it's my fault, or not. I rather think that, if I lived with you, I shouldn't be like that. But I'm not so sure.

"At home, when I come back in the evening—if you only could imagine what they're like!" he went on, after a while, staring into the distance. "Father has never taken me seriously. The Abbés tell him I'm a perfect terror at school; that's to suck up to him, of course, to make out they're having no end of trouble bringing up the son of M. Thibault, who has a lot of influence with the Cathedral people. But Papa is kind, you know"—his voice took on a sudden fervour— "awfully kind, really. Only—I don't know how to explain it. He's so wrapped up in his public duties, his committees, in his lectures and religion. And Mademoiselle, too; whenever something goes wrong with me, it's always God who's punishing me for my sins. Do you understand? After dinner Papa always shuts himself up in his study, and Mademoiselle hears my lessons—I never know them!—in Gise's room, while she puts her to bed. She won't even let me stay alone in my room. They've unscrewed my switch—would you believe it?— to prevent me using the electric light."

"What about your brother?" Daniel asked.

"Oh, Antoine, he's an awfully good sort; only he's always out. I rather think, though he's never said anything to me about it, that he, too, doesn't much like being at home. He was quite grown up when Mother died; he's exactly nine years older than I—so Mademoiselle never managed to get much of a hold over him. It's different for me, of course; she's looked after me all my life."

Daniel said nothing.

"You can't imagine what it's like," Jacques repeated. "Your people know how to treat *you*; you've been brought up quite differently. It's the same with books. *You* are allowed to read everything; all the bookshelves are open in your home. But I'm never allowed to read anything except rotten old picture-books, bound in red and gold, Jules Verne, and all that sort of rubbish. They don't even know I write poetry. It's just as well. They'd raise such a row about it, they wouldn't understand. And very likely they'd ask the masters to keep an eye on me and give me a putrid time at school."

There was a rather long silence. Swerving from the sea, the road began to climb towards a grove of cork-trees.

Suddenly Daniel drew nearer Jacques and took his arm.

"Listen," he said, and his voice, which was just breaking, had a low, sonorous emphasis, "I'm thinking of the future. One never can tell. We might be separated from each other some day. There's something I've been wanting to ask you for a long time, something that would … would seal our friendship, for always. Promise that you'll dedicate your first book of poems to me. Oh, you needn't put the name. Just, *To My Friend*. Will you, Jacques?"

"I swear it," Jacques said, and it seemed to him that he had suddenly grown taller… .

Entering the wood, they sat down under the trees. Over Marseille the sun was setting in a blaze of fire. Feeling his ankles swollen and painful, Jacques took off his shoes and socks and lay down on the grass. Daniel looked at him absent-mindedly; then suddenly he averted his eyes from the small bare feet with the reddened heels.

"Look, there's a lighthouse!" Jacques exclaimed, pointing towards the horizon. Daniel gave a start. Far away, on the coast, an intermittent gleam raked the dusk. Daniel made no comment.

The air was cooler when they started off again. They had intended to sleep out under the trees, but it looked like being a bitterly cold night.

They walked on for half an hour without exchanging a word. Presently they came to a newly whitewashed inn, with arbours overlooking the sea.

The lights were on in the main room; it was apparently empty. They eyed each other doubtfully. A woman, who had seen them hesitating near the entrance, opened the door. She held up to their faces a glass lamp, the oil in which gleamed like a topaz. She was a short, elderly person, with two gold pendants dangling from her ears along her scraggy neck.

"Excuse me, Madame," Daniel said; "could you let us have a room with two beds for the night?" Without giving her time to put any questions, he went on. "My brother and I are on our way to meet our father at Toulon; only we left Marseille too late to reach Toulon tonight."

"That's a good one!" the woman laughed. She had merry, surprisingly youthful eyes, and gesticulated freely as she talked. "You were going to Toulon on foot, were you? Tell that to the marines, my boy! Anyhow, it's all the same to me. Yes, you can have a room for two francs—cash down, of course." And, while Daniel was bringing out his wallet, she added: "I've some soup on the fire. Like a couple of platefuls?"

Both said yes.

The room was an attic and there was only one bed, the sheets of which showed signs of having already been used. Prompted by the same unspoken motive, they rapidly took off their shoes and slipped into bed, fully dressed, back to back.

It was long before they fell asleep. The moon shone full through the window. Rats were scampering about in an adjoining loft. Jacques saw a hideous-looking spider crawling on the dingy grey wall and, as he watched it vanish into the darkness, vowed he would stay awake all night. Daniel's mind was full of pictures of the sensual pleasure of the morning, and imagination was already adding its lascivious glamour to his memories. Sweating, thrilled with delight, disgust, and curiosity, he dared not move.

Next morning, when Jacques was still asleep, Daniel was on the point of rising, to get some respite from the phantoms of his imagination, when he heard a disturbance in the inn-parlour below. So vivid had been his nightlong obsessions that his first idea was that the police were coming to arrest him for his licentious conduct. And, no sooner did the door open (the bolt had broken off) than it was a policeman who appeared, accompanied by the proprietress. As he came in he hit his forehead on the lintel and knocked off his *képi*.

"The youngsters fetched up here last evening, covered with dust." The woman was still laughing, her ear-drops swaying to and fro. "They told me all sorts of fancy yarns—that they wanted to walk all the way to Toulon, and the good Lord knows what else! And that young scamp"—she extended a long arm jingling with bangles towards Daniel—"gave me a hundred-franc note to pay the four francs fifty for their room and supper."

The gendarme was dusting his *képi* with an air of bored indifference.

"Come along, boys, up with you!" he grumbled. "Now then, what's your names, first names, and the rest of it?"

Daniel hesitated. But Jacques jumped off the bed in his knickerbockers and socks, aggressive as a young fighting-cock. For a moment it looked as if he would try to lay out the tall, stalwart gendarme.

"I'm Maurice Legrand!" he shouted in the man's face. "And this is Georges, my brother. Our father's at Toulon. And you shan't stop us going to meet him there. I defy you to!"

A few hours later they were entering Marseille in a farm-cart, with two gendarmes and a miscreant in handcuffs beside them. The lofty prison-gate opened, then clanged to behind them.

"Go in there," a policeman told them, opening the door of a cell. "Now turn out your pockets. Yes, hand it all over. You'll be left together till dinner-time, while we check up on your story."

But long before then a sergeant came and took them to the inspector's office.

"It's no use denying it, my boys; you're nabbed. We've been looking for you since Sunday. You've come from Paris; the big boy's name is Fontanin, and you are Thibault. Fancy boys like you, from decent families, taking to the roads like little tramps!"

Daniel had assumed an air of outraged dignity, but inwardly he felt vastly relieved. Thank goodness, it was over! His mother knew by now that he was alive and safe, and she was awaiting his return. He would beg her forgiveness, and that would blot out everything — yes, everything!—even what he was thinking of with such horror at that moment. *That*, anyhow, he would never dare to confess to any one in the world.

Jacques gritted his teeth and, remembering his bottle of iodine and the dagger, clenched his fists ragefully in his empty pockets. A host of schemes for vengeance or escape flashed through his mind. But just then the officer spoke again.

"Your poor parents are in a terrible state."

Jacques cast a furious glance around him; then suddenly his face seemed to crumple up and he burst into tears. He had pictured his father, Mademoiselle, little Gise… . His heart overflowed with affection and regret.

"Now go and have a sleep," the inspector went on. "We'll fix things up for you tomorrow. I'm waiting for instructions."

# VIII

FOR two days Jenny had been in a comatose state; the fever had gone down, leaving her very weak. Standing at the window, Mme. de Fontanin was keenly on the alert for every sound that came from the avenue. Antoine had gone to Marseille to fetch the runaways and was due to bring them home that evening. Nine o'clock had just struck; they should be here by now.

She gave a start. That surely was a cab pulling up in front of the house!

In a flash she was out on the landing outside the entrance of her flat, clasping the banisters. The dog had run out after her and was barking to greet the homecomer. Mme. de Fontanin leaned over the rail. There, suddenly, queerly foreshortened by the height, there he was coming up the stairs! That was his hat, with the brim hiding his face; that was the way he had of moving his shoulders as he walked. He was in front; Antoine followed, holding his brother by the hand.

Looking up, Daniel saw his mother. The landing lamp, just above her head, made her hair snow-white, and plunged her face in shadow, yet it seemed to him he had seen her every feature. With lowered eyes he continued on his way up the stairs, intuitively conscious that she was coming down to meet him. Suddenly he felt incapable of making another step, and, just as he was taking off his hat, still not daring to raise his head and hardly daring to breathe, he found himself clasped in her arms, his forehead on her breast. Yet he felt little of the joy he had expected. He had longed so intensely for this moment that when it came he had no more feeling left, and when at last he freed himself from her embrace, his face was shamefast, tearless. It was Jacques, with his back against the staircase wall, who burst out sobbing.

Mme. de Fontanin took her son's face between her hands, and drew it to her lips. Not a word of reproach; a long kiss. But the agony of mind she had endured during that terrible week made her voice tremble when she spoke to Antoine.

"Have the poor children had any dinner?"

Before Antoine could reply, Daniel had murmured: "Jenny? How is she?"

"She's out of danger now; she's in bed and you shall see her; she is waiting for you." Daniel freed himself at once and ran into the flat. She called after him: "Gently, dear! Don't forget she's been very ill. You mustn't excite her."

Jacques's tears were quickly dried, and now he could not refrain from casting a curious glance around him. So this was Daniel's home, this was the staircase he climbed each day when he came back from school; that was the hall he entered and this the lady he called "Mother" with that strange tenderness in his voice.

"What about you, Jacques?" she smiled. "Will you kiss me, too?" "Speak up, Jacques!" Antoine laughed, giving his brother a slight push.

She extended her arms towards him. Jacques slipped between them, pillowing his head where Daniel's had lain a little while before. Pensively Mme. de Fontanin stroked the boy's red hair; then, turning towards the elder brother, she tried to smile. As Antoine remained standing by the door, evidently anxious to leave, she held out to him, over the head of the boy whose arms were round her now, both her hands in token of her gratitude, and said to Jacques:

"Go, my dear; your father, too, must be longing to see you."

Jenny's door stood open.

Kneeling at the bedside on one knee, his head resting on the sheets, Daniel was pressing his lips to his sister's hands, clasped within his own. Jenny had been crying; to reach out towards him she had twisted herself sideways on the pillow, and the strain showed on her face. It was so emaciated as to seem expressionless, but for the eyes. In their look there still was something morbid, and a trace of hardness, almost obstinacy; they were almost the eyes of a grown woman, and they had a dark inscrutability, wise beyond her years, as if the light-heartedness of youth had long forsaken her.

Mme. de Fontanin went up to the bed. On the point of bending down and gathering the two children in her arms she remembered that she must take care not to tire Jenny. She made Daniel get up and come with her to her own room.

The room was brightly lit and cheerful. In front of the fireplace Mme. de Fontanin had set out the tea-table, with toast and butter and honey. Kept hot under a napkin was a mound of boiled chestnuts, one of Daniel's favourite dishes. The kettle was purring; the room was very warm and the air so stuffy that Daniel felt almost nauseated. He waved away the plate his mother held out to him. A look of disappointment settled on her face.

"What is it, dear? I hope you're not going to deprive me of the pleasure of a cup of tea with you this evening?"

Daniel gazed at her. Something about her had changed; what was it? She was drinking her tea as she always did, in little scalding sips, and he could see her face with the light behind it smiling through the vapour rising from her cup. Yes, for all its traces of exhaustion, it was the face that he had always known. But there was something in the smile, the lingering gaze—no, he could not bear its too-much-sweetness! Lowering his eyes, he helped himself to buttered toast and, to keep himself in countenance, pretended to be eating it. She smiled all the more, lost in her wordless happiness, and found an outlet for her rush of emotion in gently stroking the head of the little dog, which was nestling in the folds of her dress.

Daniel put down his toast. Without raising his eyes, he asked: "What did they tell you at the lycée?" His cheeks had gone pale.

"I told them—it wasn't true."

At last Daniel's brows relaxed. Raising his eyes, he met his mother's gaze; there was trust in it but, none the less, a silent question, as if she sought for confirmation of her trust. And happily Daniel's candid eyes confirmed it beyond all manner of doubt. Her face was shining with joy as she went up to him.

"Why," she whispered, "oh, why didn't you come and tell me about it, my big boy, instead of …?"

She left the question unended, and stood up. There was the jingle of a bunch of keys in the hall. She stood unmoving, looking towards the opening door. The dog began wagging its tail and ran, without barking, to meet the old friend who had entered.

It was Jerome.

He was smiling.

Wearing neither overcoat nor hat, he came in so naturally that one could have sworn he had just walked across from his own room. He glanced at Daniel, but went up at once to his wife and kissed her extended hand. A faint perfume of verbena and lavender hovered round him.

"Well, darling, here I am! What's been happening? Really, I've been dreadfully worried."

Daniel went up to him delightedly. Little by little he had come to love his father, though in early childhood he had for many years displayed an exclusive, jealous affection for his mother. Even now he accepted with unconscious satisfaction the fact that his father was so often away and left them to themselves.

"So you're back, Daniel, after all? What's all this they've been telling me about you?" Jerome was holding his son's chin and observing him frowningly.

Mme. de Fontanin had remained standing. "When he returns," she had said to herself, "I shall refuse to let him stay." Her resentment had not weakened, nor her resolve; but he had caught her unawares, had taken everything for granted with such airy unconcern that she was at a loss. She could not take her eyes off him; she would not admit to herself how profoundly she was affected by his presence, how touched she still was by the winning charm of his look, his smile, his gestures; would not admit that he was the one love of her life. The money problem had just crossed her mind, and she fell back on it to justify her weakness. That morning she had had to broach the remnants of her savings, and now was practically at her last penny. Jerome, of course, knew it; probably he was bringing the money needed to tide over the month.

At a loss how to answer, Daniel had turned to his mother, and just then he saw a look flitting across the calm, maternal face, a look of something—he could not have put it into words—something so significant, so intimate, that he turned away with a feeling of bashfulness. At Marseille he had lost even the innocence of the eye.

"Ought I to scold him, sweetheart?" Jerome's lips parted in an insinuating smile that showed his flashing teeth. "Must I play the stern father?"

She did not reply at once. Then, with an undertone of bitterness, of a desire to punish him, she blurted out: "Do you realize that Jenny very nearly died?"

He let go his son and took a step towards her, and such was the consternation on his face that she was ready to forgive him on the spot, if only to wipe out the distress that she had deliberately caused him.

"But she's much better now. The danger's past!" she exclaimed.

She forced herself to smile, so as to reassure him the sooner, and the smile was tantamount to a capitulation. She was aware of it. Everything seemed to be conspiring against her dignity.

"Go and see her," she added, noticing that Jerome's hands were shaking. "But please don't wake her."

Some minutes passed. Mme. de Fontanin sat down. Jerome came back on tip-toe, shutting the door very carefully. His face was radiant with affection; no trace of apprehension remained. He was laughing again, and his eyes twinkled.

"Ah, if you'd seen her just now! Charming! She's lying on her side, her cheek resting on her hand." His fingers sketched in air the graceful outlines. "She has grown thinner, but that's almost a good thing, really; it makes her all the prettier, don't you think so?"

She did not answer. He was staring at her with a puzzled air.

"Why, Thérèse, you've gone quite white!"

She rose, and almost ran to the mirror above the mantelpiece. It was true; in those two days of anxiety her hair, which till then had been fair, with a light silver sheen, had turned completely white over the temples. And now Daniel understood what had seemed to him different, inexplicable since his homecoming. Mme. de Fontanin scanned her reflected self, uncertain of her feelings but unable to stifle a regret. Then, in the mirror, she saw Jerome's face smiling towards her and unwittingly she found a consolation in his smile. He seemed amused, and lightly touched a vagrant silver lock that floated in the lamplight.

"Nothing could suit you better, sweetheart; nothing could better set off—what shall I call it?—the youngness of your eyes."

When she answered, the words, seemingly an excuse, served to mask her secret pleasure.

"Oh, Jerome, I've been through some awful days and nights! On Wednesday we'd tried everything, and we'd lost hope. I was all alone. I was so frightened!"

"Poor darling!" he cried impulsively. "I'm dreadfully sorry; I could so easily have come back. I was at Lyon on that business you know about." He spoke with such assurance that for a moment she began to search her memory. "I'd completely forgotten that you hadn't my address. And besides, I'd only gone away for twenty-four hours; I've even wasted my return ticket."

Just then it flashed across his mind that he had given Thérèse no money for a long while. Annoying! He had no money coming in for another three weeks. He reckoned up what he had on him and unthinkingly made a grimace which, however, he promptly explained away.

"And to think that all my trouble was practically wasted—I just couldn't put that deal through! I went on hoping till the last day, but here I am back again, with empty pockets! Those fat Lyon bankers are infernally hard to deal with, an unbelieving lot." He launched into a story of his experiences, letting his fertile imagination run away with him, without a trace of embarrassment; he had the born story-teller's delight in his inventions.

Daniel, as he listened, felt for the first time a sort of shame for his father. Then, for no reason, without any apparent relevance, he thought of the man the woman at Marseille had told him about, her "old boy" as she had called him—a married man, in business, who always came in the afternoon, she had explained, because he never went out in the evening without "his missus." In the face of his mother, who was listening too, there was something that baffled him. Their eyes met. What did the mother read in her son's eyes? Did she see far within, into thoughts to which as yet Daniel himself had given no definite form? When she spoke there was an abruptness in her tone that betrayed her annoyance.

"Now run away to bed, my dear; you're absolutely tired out."

He obeyed. But just as he stooped to kiss her, a picture rose before him of his mother so cruelly forsaken while Jenny was on her deathbed. And his affection was enhanced by a realization of the distress he had caused her. He embraced her tenderly, murmuring in her ear:

"Forgive me."

She had been waiting for those words since his return, and now she could not feel the happiness she would have felt, had he uttered them sooner. Daniel was conscious of this, and inwardly blamed his father for it. Mme. de Fontanin, however, could not help feeling a grievance against her son; why had he not spoken sooner, while they were alone together?

Half in boyish playfulness, half out of mere gluttony, Jerome had gone up to the tray and was examining the "spread" with comically pursed lips.

"My word, and who are all these nice things for?"

His laughter never sounded quite natural; he would throw back his head, slewing round his pupils into the corners of his eyes, and then emit in quick succession three rather theatrical Ha's: "Hal Ha! Ha!"

He had drawn up a stool to the table and was already busy with the tea-pot.

"Don't drink that tea, it's almost cold," Mme. de Fontanin said, and lit the spirit-lamp under the kettle. When he protested, she added, but unsmilingly: "No—I insist!"

They were alone. To attend to the tea, she had come up to the table, and the bitter-sweet perfume of the lavender and verbena scent he used came to her nostrils. He looked up at her with a half-smile; his look conveyed at once affection and repentance. Keeping his slice of buttered toast in one hand, like a hungry schoolboy, he slipped an arm round his wife's waist with a free-and-easy deftness that showed long experience in the amorous art. Mme. de Fontanin freed herself abruptly; she knew her weakness, and dreaded it. When he withdrew his arm she came back to finish making the tea, then moved away once more.

She wore a look of dignity and sadness, but somehow his complete insouciance had taken the sting out of her resentment. She studied his appearance, surreptitiously, in the mirror. His amber-coloured skin, his almond eyes, the graceful poise of his body, the slightly exotic refinement of his dress, and his languid airs gave him an oriental charm. She remembered having written in her diary, during their engagement: *My Beloved is beautiful as an Indian Prince*. And even tonight she was seeing him through the same eyes as in those far-off days. He was sitting slantwise on a stool that was too low for him, and stretching his legs towards the fire. Daintily his fingers, tipped by well-manicured nails, were taking up slices of toast, one after another, and gilding them with honey. As, bending above the plate, he ate them, his white teeth flashed. When he had finished eating, he drank his tea at a gulp, rose with a dancer's suppleness, and ensconced himself in an arm-chair. He behaved exactly as if nothing had happened and he were living here now just as he had always done. The dog jumped onto his knee and he began patting it. His left ring-finger bore a large sardonyx ring left him by his mother, an ancient cameo on which the milk-white figure of a Ganymede rose from a deep black background. The gold had worn down with the years and the ring kept on slipping to and fro as he moved his hand. His wife watched all his gestures intently.

"Do you mind if I light a cigarette, sweetheart?"

Incorrigible he was—but how charming! He had a way of his own of pronouncing that word "sweetheart," letting the syllables flutter on his lips, like a kiss. His silver cigarette-case shone between his fingers; she recognized so well the little brittle click it made and, yes, he had still that habit of tapping his cigarette on the back of his hand before putting it into his mouth. And how well she knew them, too, those long, veined hands that the lighted match changed suddenly to two translucent, flame-red shells!

She steeled herself to calmness as she cleared the tea-table. This last week had broken her, and she realized it just at the moment she needed all her courage. She sat down. She no longer knew what to think; she could not clearly discern what the Spirit wished of her. Was it God's will that she should stay beside this sinner who, even in his worst lapses, always remained amenable to the promptings of his kindly heart, so that she might guide him one day towards a better life? No, her immediate duty was to safeguard the home, the children. Little by little she was vanquishing her weakness, and it was a relief to find herself more resolute than she had foreseen. The decision she had come to during Jerome's absence—when, after prayer, a still small voice within had counselled her—held good.

Jerome had been watching her for some time with meditative eyes. Now his face took on an expression of intense sincerity. Only too well she knew that seeming-timid smile, that look of circumspection; and they dismayed her. For, though she had a knack of deciphering at any moment, almost without conscious effort, what lay behind her husband's frequent changes of expression, all the same her intuition always ended by being held up at a certain definite point, beyond which lay a quicksand of uncertainties. How often she had asked herself: What kind of man is he really, under the surface?

"I see how it is." There was a touch of rather perfunctory regret in Jerome's voice. "I can see you judge me severely, Thérèse. Oh, I understand you—only too well. If another man behaved like that, I'd judge him as you do. I'd think of him as being a scoundrel. Yes, a scoundrel—why mince words? Ah, how on earth can I make you understand …?"

"What's the good?" she broke in miserably, casting him a naiively beseeching look. Never, alas, could she conceal her feelings!

He was smoking, lying well back in the arm-chair; he had crossed his legs, and the ankle of the leg he was indolently swinging was well in evidence.

"Don't worry, Thérèse; I'm not going to argue about it. The facts are there, and the facts condemn me. And yet … perhaps there are other explanations for it all than the all too obvious ones." He smiled sadly. He had a weakness for expatiating on his faults, and invoking arguments of a moral order—a procedure which perhaps appeased what was left of his Protestant upbringing. "Often," he said, "a bad deed springs from motives of a different kind. One may seem to be out merely to gratify, quite shamelessly, one's instincts, but sometimes, indeed quite often, one is actually giving way to an emotion that is not a bad one—to pity, for instance. When one causes suffering to someone whom one loves, the reason sometimes is that one's sorry for someone else, someone who's in trouble, or of a lower walk of life—to whom a little kindness might mean salvation."

A picture rose before her of the girl she had seen sobbing by the riverside. And other memories took form, of Mariette, of Noémie… . Her eyes were held by the movement of his patent-leather shoe, swinging to and fro, now lit up by the lamplight, now in shadow. She remembered the early days of their marriage—those "business dinners," so urgent and so unforeseen, from which he had come back at dawn, only to shut himself up in his room and sleep till evening. And all the anonymous letters she had glanced through, then torn up, burned, or ground under her heel, but without being able to stamp out their rankling maleficence. She had seen Jerome seduce her maids, and turn the heads of her friends, one by one. He had made a void around her. She remembered the reproaches which at first she had ventured to address to him, and the many occasions on which, without making any "scene," she had spoken to him frankly but with indulgence—only to find herself confronted by a being at the mercy of his every impulse, self-centred and

evasive, who began by denying everything with puritanical indignation and, immediately after, vowed smilingly that he would never do it again.

"Yes, indeed," he was saying, "I've treated you abominably. Abominably! Don't let's be afraid of words. And yet I love you, Thérèse, with all my soul; I look up to you and I'm sorry for you. There's been nothing in my life, nothing which at any time, even for a moment, could stand beside my love for you, the only truly deep and permanent love I've ever felt

"Yes, my way of living is disgusting; I don't defend it, I'm ashamed of it. But really, sweetheart, you're doing me an injustice; yes, for all your sense of justice, you're unfair if you judge me by my acts. I admit my … my lapses, but they aren't all of me. Oh, I'm explaining myself badly, I know; I feel you aren't listening to me. It's all so terribly complicated, far more so than I can ever explain, in fact. I only get glimpses of it myself, in flashes… ."

He fell silent and leaned forward, his eyes focused on the void, as if he had worn himself out in a vain effort to attain for a moment the uttermost truth about his life. Then he raised his head and Mme. de Fontanin felt his gaze lingering on her face, that careless glance of his, seemingly so light, but endowed with a strange power of fascination for the eyes of others. It was as if his gaze drew their eyes towards it, and held them trapped inescapably for a moment, then released them—like a magnet attracting, lifting, and letting fall a weight too heavy for it. Once again their eyes met and parted. She was thinking: "Yes, you are better than the life you lead." But she merely shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't believe me?" he murmured.

"Oh, I'm quite ready to believe you." She tried to speak in a detached tone. "I've done it so many times before … but that isn't the point. Guilty or not, responsible or not, Jerome, you have done wrong, you are doing wrong every day, and will go on doing so. And that state of things can't be allowed to last. Let us part for good."

The fact that she had been thinking it over so assiduously during the past four days imparted to her voice an emphasis and harshness that Jerome could not ignore. Seeing his amazement and distress, she hastened to add:

"It's the children I'm thinking of. So long as they were small, they didn't understand, and I was the only one who …" On the point of adding "suffered," a sense of shame prevented her. "The wrong you've done me, Jerome, no longer concerns me only and my … personal feelings. It comes in here with you, it's in the very air of our home, the air my children breathe. I will not allow this state of things to go on. Look what Daniel did this week! May God forgive him, as I've forgiven him for hurting me so cruelly. He is sorry for it; his heart is still uncorrupted." Her eyes lit with a flash of pride that was almost a challenge. "But I'm sure it was your example that led him astray. Would he have gone off so light-heartedly, without a thought for my anxiety, if he hadn't seen you so often going away from us … on 'business'?" She rose, took an uncertain step towards the fireplace, and saw in the mirror her white hair; then, bending a little towards her husband, without looking at him, she went on speaking. "I've been thinking deeply about it, Jerome. I have suffered a great deal this week and I have prayed and pondered. I've not the least wish to reproach you. In any case, I'm feeling so dreadfully tired tonight, I don't wish to talk about it. I only ask you to face the facts. You'll have to admit I'm right, that there's no other way out. Life in common"—she caught herself up—"what remains to us of our life in common, little though it is, is still too much. Yes, Jerome, too much." She drew herself erect, rested her hands on the marble mantelpiece, and, stressing each word with a movement of her head and shoulders, said gravely: "*I will not bear it any longer*."

Jerome made no answer, but, before she could retreat, he had slipped to her feet and pressed his face against her knee, like a child pleading to be forgiven.

"How could I possibly separate from you?" he murmured abjectly. "How could I live without my children? I'd rather blow my brains out!"

She felt almost like smiling, so naively melodramatic was the gesture with which he aimed his forefinger at his forehead. Thérèse's arm was hanging at her side; grasping her wrist, he covered it with kisses. Gently she freed her hand and listlessly, hardly knowing what she was doing, began to stroke his forehead with her fingertips. The gesture, seemingly maternal, was one of utter, unchangeable detachment. He misinterpreted it and raised his head; but a glance at her face showed him how grievously he was mistaken. She moved away at once, and pointed to a travelling-clock on the bedside table. "Two o'clock. It's terribly late. No more tonight, please. Tomorrow, perhaps… ."

He glanced at the clock and from it to the double bed with its solitary pillow, made ready for the night.

"I'm afraid you'll have trouble in finding a cab," she said.

He made a vague, puzzled movement; obviously the idea of going out again that night had never entered his head. Was it not his home here? His bedroom was, as ever, awaiting him, just across the passage. How often had he returned like this, in the small hours, after a five-or six-day escapade! On such occasions he would appear next morning at the breakfast table in pyjamas, but very spick and span, joking and laughing rather loud, so as to quell his children's unspoken mistrust, which he felt but did not understand.

Used to his ways, Mme. de Fontanin had followed on his face the trend his thoughts had taken; but she did not waver, and opened the door leading into the hall. He walked out, inwardly discomfited, but heroically keeping the appearance of an old friend saying goodbye to his hostess.

While he was putting on his overcoat, it occurred to him again that his wife must be short of money. He would have handed over to her such little money as he had, readily enough—though he was not in a position to put himself in funds again. But the thought that such an incident might create an awkward situation, that, after taking the money, she might no longer feel at liberty to show him out so firmly, offended his sense of delicacy. Worse still, Thérèse might suspect him of an ulterior motive.

"Sweetheart," he said simply, "I have a great deal more to say to you."

A thought flashed through her mind, first of her intention to break with him, then of the money she needed. Hastily she answered: "Tomorrow, Jerome. I'll see you tomorrow, if you'll come here. We'll have a talk."

There was nothing for him but to take his leave, and he did so with good grace, clasping her hand and pressing his lips to it. Even then both hesitated for a moment. But she quickly withdrew her hand and opened the door of the flat. "Well, *au revoir*, sweet-heart. Till tomorrow!" Her last glimpse of him as he began going down the stairs was his smile and courteous gesture as he raised his hat, bowing towards her. The door closed. Left to her solitary musings, Mme. de Fontanin leaned her forehead on the door-jamb; the clang of the closing street door jarred the whole building and she could feel the vibration in her cheek. A light-coloured glove was lying on the carpet almost under her eyes. Without thinking, she picked it up and pressed it to her lips. Across the smell of leather and tobacco-smoke she seemed to detect a subtler, familiar perfume. Then, seeing her gesture reflected in a glass, she blushed, let the glove fall again, switched o the lights almost angrily, and, freed from her own reproachful gaze by the kindly darkness, groped her way hastily to the children's rooms, and stayed a little while in each, listening to their tranquil breathing.

# IX

ANTOINE and Jacques were back in the cab. The horse's hoofs rattled on the roadway like castanets, but they made slow progress. The streets were in darkness. A smell of musty cloth pervaded the rickety old vehicle. Jacques was crying. Utter weariness and the kiss he had just received from the lady with the mothering smile had at last filled him with contrition. What ever was he going to say to his father? He felt at his wit's end; unable to conceal his anguish, he sought consolation from his brother, pressing himself against his shoulder. Antoine put his arm round him. For the first time the barrier of their mutual shyness was withdrawn.

Antoine wanted to say something, but could not overcome his distaste for effusion, and when he spoke there was a forced heartiness in his voice that made it sound almost gruff.

"Now then, old man! Buck up! There's no need to get into such a stew about it, you know. It's all over now."

For a moment he pressed the boy to him affectionately, without speaking. But he was unable to restrain his curiosity.

"What came over you, Jacques?" His voice was gentler now. "What really happened? Did he persuade you to run away?"

"Oh, no. He didn't want to a bit. It was all my idea."

"Then why …?"

No answer. Antoine fumbled for his words as he continued.

"You know, Jacques, I know all about these school … intimacies. You needn't mind telling me. I know how it is; one lets oneself be led on."

"He's my friend, that's all," Jacques whispered, still pressing against his brother's shoulder.

"But," Antoine ventured, "what exactly … what do you do together?"

"We talk. He consoles me."

Antoine did not dare to ask more questions. "He consoles me!" Jacques's tone cut him to the heart. He was on the point of saying: "Are you so unhappy, old man?" when Jacques burst out, almost truculently v

"Well, if you want to know 'everything'—he corrects my poems."

"Good for you!" Antoine smiled. "I'm delighted to hear that. Do you know, I'm very glad you're a poet!"

"Honour bright?" the boy asked.

"Yes, honour bright. I knew it anyhow. I've seen some of your poems; you left them lying about, you know, and I had a squint at them. I never spoke about it to you. As a matter of fact, we never do seem to talk together, I can't think why. Some of your poems struck me as damned good, d'you know! You've quite a gift for that sort of thing, and you must make the most of it."

Jacques nestled up to his brother.

"Yes, I'm awfully keen on poetry," he whispered. "There are some poems that I love more than anything else in the world. Fontanin lends me books—but you won't tell anyone, will you? It's thanks to him I've read Laprade and Sully-Prudhomme and Lamartine and Victor Hugo and Musset. Musset's wonderful! Do you know this one, I wonder?

*Pâle étoile du soir messagère lointaine.*
*Dont le front sort brillant des voiles du couchant.*

"And this one:

*"Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,*
*O Seigneur, a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre,*
*Et nous sommes encor tout mêlés l'un à l'autre,*
*Elle à demi vivante et moi mort a demi.*

"And Lamartine's 'Le Crucifix,' do you know it?

*"Toi que j'ai recueilli sur sa bouche expirante,*
*Avec son dernier souffle et son dernier adieu …*

"It's lovely, isn't it? So , . . so wonderfully limpid. Each time I read that, the beauty of it almost hurts me." And now he poured out his heart without reserve. "At home they don't understand a thing; I'm certain I'd be plagued if they knew that I write poems. You're not like them"—he pressed Antoine's arm against his breast—"somehow I've felt you weren't, for ages. Only you never said anything, and, besides, you're not often there. Oh, if you only knew how happy I am! I feel that now I'm going to have two friends instead of one."

Antoine recited, smiling, a line of one of Jacques's own poems:

"Hail Caesar! Lo, the blue-eyed maid from Gaul …"

Jacques moved away suddenly, exclaiming: "You've read our exercise-book!"

"But, old chap, why ever …?"

"Has Father read it too?" So piteous was the cry that Antoine dared not tell the truth.

"I don't really know. A page or two, perhaps."

Before he could say more Jacques had recoiled to the far corner of the cab; he sat there rocking himself to and fro, his head between his hands.

"It's foul! That Abbé is a Jesuit, a filthy beast! I shall tell him so, I'll shout at him in the middle of the class-room, I'll spit in his beastly face. They can expel me; I don't care a damn, I'll run away again. I'll kill myself!"

His whole body was shaking with fury. Antoine dared not breathe a word. Suddenly the boy stopped shouting and sank back into the corner, pressing his hands to his eyes. His teeth were chattering, and his silence alarmed Antoine even more than his outburst of rage. Fortunately the cab was entering the Rue des Saints-Peres; they were almost home.

Jacques got out first. Antoine, as he paid the cabman, never took his eyes off his brother, fearing he might make a sudden rush into the darkness. But now the boy seemed utterly exhausted; the elfish little face was drawn and haggard with fatigue and disappointment, and the eyes, fixed on the ground, were dry.

"Ring the bell, will you?" Antoine said.

Jacques said nothing and did not move. Antoine gently coaxed him towards the door. Lamb-like, Jacques followed his brother through the hall, without even troubling to think that the curious eyes of the old concierge, Mme. Fruhling, were watching him. He had realized his helplessness and had no heart left to resist. The elevator whisked him up, more dead than alive, to face his father's righteous indignation. He was trapped again in the prison-house of the Family, of the social order, inescapably.

And yet, when he stood again on the landing, when he saw all the lamps lit in the hall as on the evenings when his father gave his stag dinner-parties, somehow he could not help finding a certain restfulness in the familiar home-life closing in again around him. When he saw Mademoiselle come limping up the hall, thinner and shakier than ever, he felt his rancour passing and a sudden impulse to throw himself into the embrace of the stumpy black-sleeved arms stretched out towards him. She pressed the boy to her, fondling him affectionately, but all the time scolding him in a shrill, quavering monotone. "Oh, dear! What wickedness! The cruel, heartless boy! Did you want to make us die of grief? Bless and save us, what wickedness! Haven't you any heart at all?" The litany of reproach went on, while large tears brimmed over from her llama-like eyes.

The door of the study opened. Jacques saw his father standing on the threshold, looking down the hall.

His eyes fell at once on Jacques, and he could not check an impulse of affectionate emotion. But then he halted, let his eyelids close; he seemed to be waiting for the culprit to fling himself at his feet, as in the Greuze picture, a copy of which hung in the drawing-room.

Shyness prevented Jacques from moving towards his father.

The study, too, was lit up as if for some festivity, and the two maids had just appeared at the kitchen door. Moreover, M. Thibault was in a frock-coat, though it was the hour when he usually wore a smoking-jacket. The boy felt paralysed by the queerness of it all. He freed himself from Mademoiselle's embrace, shrank back, and stood, with bowed head, waiting for he knew not what, so flustered by a rush of pent-up feeling that he felt an uncontrollable impulse to weep and, in the same breath, burst out laughing.

But M. Thibault's first words seemed to ban him from the family circle. Jacques's attitude, in the presence of witnesses, had effectively dispelled any inclination to indulgence which he might have felt. The better to bring the young rebel to heel, he feigned complete detachment.

"Ah, so you're back!" He addressed the words solely to Antoine. "I was beginning to wonder. Did everything go off all right?" When Antoine nodded, shaking the flabby hand his father held out to him, he continued: "I'm very grateful to you, my dear boy, for sparing me a distasteful task. Most distasteful indeed!"

He paused, still hoping for some gesture of contrition from his younger son. But the boy was staring sullenly at the carpet. M. Thibault glanced first at the culprit, then at the maids. Now he was definitely angry.

"We'll decide tomorrow on the best course to adopt, to prevent the repetition of such scandalous misconduct."

Mademoiselle made a step towards Jacques, to urge him to his father's arms—a movement Jacques was aware of, though he did not raise his eyes. Indeed he had been waiting for it, his last forlorn chance of reconciliation. But M. Thibault stretched out a peremptory arm.

"Let him be! He's a young scoundrel, with a heart of stone. Was he worth all the anxiety we've gone through on his account?" He turned again to Antoine, who was watching for an opportunity to intervene. "Antoine, dear boy, do us the favour of looking after this miserable boy for one night more. Tomorrow, I promise you, you shall be freed from all responsibility for him."

There was still a moment of indecision. Antoine went up to his father; Jacques timidly raised his head. But now M. Thibault was speaking again, in a tone that brooked no controversy.

"Now then, Antoine, you heard what I said? Take him off to his room. This revolting scene has lasted quite long enough. Take him away."

Steering Jacques in front of him, Antoine vanished down the corridor; the maids shrank back against the walls, as if they were watching victims on their way to execution. M. Thibault, his eyes still closed, went back to his study and shut the door behind him.

He went straight across it into the room where he slept. The furniture had come to him from his parents, and the room was exactly like their bedroom as he had known it in his early childhood, in the residence attached to his father's factory near Rouen. After his father's death he had brought the whole lot of it to Paris, where he had come to study law. He had kept everything as it was: the mahogany chest of drawers, the old-fashioned chairs, the blue rep curtains, the bed in which his father and his mother had died. Before the *prie-dieu*, the upholstery of which had been embroidered by Mme. Thibault, hung the crucifix which he himself, at a few months' interval, had placed between their folded, lifeless hands.

Alone now, he could be himself again; he let 'his shoulders droop, and yet the mask of fatigue seemed to have slipped from the heavy features, leaving them with a simple, almost childish look that recalled the portraits of him as a boy. He went to the prie-dieu and, kneeling down, gave himself up to prayer. His puffy hands moved rapidly to and fro—a habit with him when he was by himself; there was something unconstrained, yet curiously clandestine, in all his gestures now he was alone. He raised his expressionless face, and the eyes, under the half-shut lids, went straight to the crucifix.

M. Thibault was committing this new burden laid upon him, his disappointment, to God's mercy, and now that his heart was purged of anger, he prayed fervently and with a father's love for his erring son. From the arm-rest on which he kept his books of devotion he took a rosary which had been given him for his first communion; after forty years' polishing the beads slipped effortlessly

between his fingers. He had shut his eyes again, but his head was still lifted, as if he were gazing at the crucifix. That smile coming from the heart and that look of candid happiness were never seen on his face in ordinary life. The words he was murmuring made his heavy cheeks quiver and the little, jerky movements of his head which he made at regular intervals to free his neck from the stiff, tight collar somehow brought to mind a censer swinging before the altar of his God.

Next morning Jacques was left to himself. Sitting on his unmade bed, he wondered what to do with himself this Saturday morning. It wasn't the holidays—quite the contrary—and yet here he was, it seemed, spending the day in his room. He thought of school, the history class, Daniel. The domestic sounds he heard outside his door seemed unfamiliar and vaguely hostile: a broom rasping the carpet, doors creaking in the wind. He was not depressed; exalted, rather; but his inactivity, coupled with the mysterious threat brooding over the house, made him feel almost unbearably ill at ease. What a relief it would have been if he could have found an opportunity for some sacrifice, some heroic and absurd act of devotion, which might have given vent to the pent-up emotions that now were suffocating him! Now and then a gust of self-pity caused him to raise his head and he felt a brief thrill of morbid pleasure, a mingled thrill of frustrated love, of pride and hatred.

The door-handle turned. It was Gisèle. Her hair had just been washed and her black curls were drying on her shoulders; she was wearing a shirt and drawers. Her brown neck, arms, and legs gave her the look of a little Algerian lad—what with her flapping drawers, with her fuzzy mop of hair, her ripe young lips, and melting dog-like eyes.

"What do you want?" Jacques asked in a peevish tone.

"I've come to see you." She looked at him intently.

During the past week little ten-year-old Gisèle had guessed more than her elders suspected. And now her Jacquot had come back! But things at home had not resumed their normal course. Just now her aunt, when doing Gisèle's hair, had suddenly been called away to see M. Thibault, and had left her in her room, her hair "all anyhow," after making her promise to "be good."

"Who was it who rang?" he asked.

"The Abbé."

Jacques frowned. She climbed onto the bed beside him.

"Poor Jacquot!" she whispered.

Her affection did him so much good that, to show his gratitude, he took her on his knees and hugged her. But his ears were on the alert.

"Run! There's someone coming!" He pushed her towards the door. He had just time enough to jump off the bed and open a grammar-book when he heard the voice of Abbé Vécard behind the door, talking to Gisèle.

"Good morning, my dear. Is Jacquot here?"

Entering, he stopped on the threshold. Jacques looked down. The Abbé came up to him and playfully tweaked his ear.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" he began.

But the stubborn look on the boy's face made him change his tactics. With Jacques he always proceeded warily. He felt for this so often erring member of his flock a particular regard, not unmixed with curiosity and a certain esteem, for he had realized the vigour of the boy's personality.

Sitting down he called Jacques towards him.

"The least thing you could do was to ask your father's forgiveness. Have you done so?" Of course, he knew perfectly well the state of affairs, and, furious with his deceit, Jacques cast him a furtively indignant look, shaking his head. For a while neither spoke.

Then the priest began in a low, somewhat ill-assured voice. "My child, I won't conceal from you that I have been deeply grieved by what has happened. Till now, for all your unruliness, I've always stood up for you. I have often said to your father: 'Jacques has a good heart, everything will come right, only we must be patient.' But now I hardly know what to say and, worse still, I have learnt things about you which never, never could I have brought myself to suspect. We'll come back to that. And yet, I said to myself: 'He will have had time to reflect, he will return to us repentant, and there is no sin that cannot be atoned for by sincere contrition.' Instead of that I find you with a stubborn face, without a semblance of regret, without a tear. Your poor father, this time, has really lost heart, and I am grieved for his sake too. He asks himself how far you have sunk in perversity, whether your heart is utterly hardened. And, upon my word, I ask myself that question too."

Clenching his fists in his pockets, Jacques pressed his chin hard against his chest so that no sob might escape from his throat, no muscle of his face betray him. He alone knew how bitterly he suffered for not having asked forgiveness, what exquisite tears he would have shed, had he had Daniel's welcome. No! Since it was thus, he would never let anyone see what he felt for his father; that almost animal attachment, tinctured with rancour, seemed to have become even keener, now that there was no hope of its being returned.

The Abbé paused. The studied calm of his features made his silence all the more telling. Then, his eyes fixed on the middle distance, without a word of introduction, he began speaking, or, rather, intoning words that Jacques knew well:

" 'A certain man had two sons… . And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all … and came to himself he said, I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son… . And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son …And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was a great way off, his father saw him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy…' "

Before the priest could utter the last word, Jacques's self-control broke down and he burst into tears.

The priest continued in a different tone:

"Yes, my child, I felt sure you were not utterly corrupted. This morning I said my mass for you. Well, like the Prodigal Son, arise and go to your father, and he will have compassion. And he, too, will say: 'Let us be merry, for this my son was lost and is found.' "

Then Jacques remembered how the hall had been lit up for his homecoming, how M. Thibault had worn his frock-coat, and it made him still more contrite to think that perhaps he had "let down" their preparations to welcome him.

“There’s something else I want to say to you,” the priest went on, stroking the boy’s hair. “Your father has just come to a grave decision about you.” He hesitated and, as he groped for his words, mechanically passed his hand to and fro over Jacques’s protruding ears, laying them flat against his cheeks, then letting them spring back. Jacques felt his ears burning, but dared not move his head. “I approve of his decision,” the Abbé added, putting his forefinger on his lip and riveting his gaze on the boy’s eyes. “He intends to send you, for a while, away from home.”

“Where?” The word was a stifled cry.

“He will tell you, my child. But whatever you may think at first, you must accept the punishment with a contrite heart, as a measure taken for your good. At the start, perhaps, it will sometimes be a little hard, when you find yourself alone for hours on end; but remember at those moments that there is no solitude for the true Christian, and that God never forsakes those who put their trust in Him. Come, my boy, come with me and ask your father’s forgiveness.”

A few minutes later Jacques was back in his room, his face swollen with tears, his cheeks blazing. He walked over to the looking-glass and gave his reflected self a look of concentrated ferocity; it was as if he felt the need of some living human form to act as the target of his malevolence, his imprecations. But just then he heard a step in the passage. Glancing at the door, he saw the key had been removed. He piled a .barricade of chairs against it. Then, running to the table, he scribbled a few lines in pencil, pushed the letter into an envelope, wrote the address, stuck on a stamp, and rose. He seemed at his wit’s end. To whom could he entrust the letter? Here, everyone was an enemy. He opened the window. The morning was grey, the street deserted. After a while an old lady and a child came slowly past. Jacques dropped the letter; it fluttered slowly down and came to rest on the pavement. When he ventured to look out of the window again, the letter had disappeared, the lady and the child were almost out of sight.

And now he gave way to his despair; with a whimpering cry, the moan of a trapped animal, he flung himself onto the bed, his feet pressing against the boards, his .body arched convulsively, his limbs quivering with baffled fury. To stifle his cries, he clenched his teeth on the pillow, for, in the chaos of his mind, one thought was clear: he must not let the others gloat over his despair.

That evening Daniel received the letter:

> To you, My Friend, to you, the only person in the world whom I love, the daystar of my life, this is my last will and testament to you.
>
> They are severing me from you, from everything; they are going to put me in a place—I dare not tell you what it is, I dare not tell you where it is. I am ashamed for my father’s sake!
>
> I feel that I shall never see you again, you who are all to me, you who alone could make me kind and good.
>
> Goodbye, my dear, goodbye.
>
> If they make me too miserable, too angry with everything, I shall kill myself. Then you must tell them that I killed myself deliberately, because of them. And that yet I loved them.
>
> But my last thought on the threshold of the next world will have been for you! For you, my friend!
>
> Farewell!

## PART II
## THE REFORMATORY

# I

DURING the nine months which had elapsed since the day when Antoine brought back the two young truants, he had not gone to see Mme. de Fontanin again. The maid, however, recognized him and, though it was nine o'clock, showed him in immediately.

Mme. de Fontanin was in her room, the two children with her. Sitting very straight under the lamp, in front of the fire, she was reading aloud. Jenny, snugly ensconced in an easy chair, was toying with her plaits and, as she listened to her mother, gazing at the flames. Daniel was sitting a little way off, his legs crossed, a drawing-board on his knee, finishing a charcoal sketch of his mother. As he paused for a moment on the dark threshold of the room, Antoine was uncomfortably conscious that his visit was ill-timed; but it was too late to retreat.

Mme. de Fontanin's greeting was rather chilly, but principally she seemed surprised to see him. Leaving her children to themselves, she led Antoine to the drawing-room. On learning the reason of his visit, however, she went out again to fetch her son.

Daniel looked seventeen now, though actually he was two years younger, and an incipient moustache darkened the curve of his upper lip. A little disconcerted, Antoine looked the youngster full in the face, in the rather blustering way he had; now his look seemed to imply: "There's no shilly-shally about me; I'm one of those fellows who always go straight to the point." As on his previous visit, an unavowed instinct led him to exaggerate this pose of "downrightness," once he was in Mme. de Fontanin's presence.

"This is it," he said. "Our meeting yesterday set me thinking and I've come to talk things over." Daniel looked surprised. "Yes," Antoine went on, "we scarcely exchanged two words—you were in a hurry and so was I; but it struck me—I don't quite know how to put it. Well, for one thing you didn't inquire about Jacques, from which I drew the conclusion that he'd been writing to you. I was right, wasn't I? What's more, I suspect he tells you things I don't know, and which I ought to know. No, wait, please, and hear what I have to say. Jacques left Paris last June; it's near the beginning of April now, which makes it nine months he's been away. I haven't seen him, he's never written to me, but Father sees him often. He tells me Jacques is fit and working well, that the solitary life and discipline have already done him a world of good. I sometimes wonder if he isn't deceiving himself, or being deceived. Since seeing you yesterday I've been feeling worried about it. I got an idea that perhaps he's unhappy in his present surroundings, but as I'm in the dark about it, there's nothing I can do to help him. And I can't bear to think that. That's why I decided to come and talk it over frankly with you. I appeal to your affection for him. It's not a question of betraying confidences, but I'm sure he tells you what his life is like in that place. You're the only one who can either reassure me, or prompt me to take active measures about it."

Daniel heard him out impassively. His first impulse had been to decline the interview altogether. Holding his head high, he gazed at Antoine, and his very indecision gave a certain aloofness to his look. At a loss, he glanced towards his mother. She had been watching him, wondering what he would do. After some minutes of suspense she smiled to him.

"Tell the truth, my boy," she said, with a decisive gesture. "One never has reason to regret it when one tells the truth."

With a gesture curiously like his mother's, Daniel began to speak. Yes, he had had letters from Thibault, now and then; letters that had become shorter and shorter, less and less communicative. Daniel knew, of course, that his friend was boarding with a tutor somewhere in the country—exactly where he did not know. The postmarks on the envelopes showed that they had been posted on a train, somewhere on the Northern Railway. Was it a sort of cramming school Jacques was at?

It was an effort for Antoine to conceal his amazement at the pains that Jacques had evidently taken to hide the truth from his closest friend. Why had he done it? Perhaps it was the same feeling of shame as that which led M. Thibault to convert, for the benefit of the world at large, the reformatory colony where he had confined his son, into "a religious institution on the banks of the Oise." A suspicion that perhaps his brother had been compelled to write such letters crossed his mind. Perhaps the poor little chap was being terrorized! He remembered the campaign run by a Beauvais newspaper of the scurrilous sort, and the lurid charges it had brought against the Social Defence League. True, M. Thibault had won his libel action against the newspaper, all along the line—yet could one be so sure …?

Antoine felt that, in the last resort, he could rely only on his own judgment.

"Might I see one of the letters?" he asked. Noticing that Daniel was blushing, he excused his abruptness with a belated smile. "Just one letter," he explained. "Whichever you care to show me."

Without answering, without waiting for a lead from his mother, Daniel rose and left the room.

Now that he was alone with Mme. de Fontanin, Antoine was conscious of the same feelings as he had had before: curiosity, a sense of an unfamiliar atmosphere, and a certain attraction. She was looking in front of her and did not seem to be thinking of anything. But her mere presence seemed enough to stimulate Antoine's mental processes and quicken his receptivity. It was as if the air around her were charged with a peculiar conductivity. And, at that moment, unmistakably, Antoine felt an atmosphere of disapproval. He was not far wrong. Though she had nothing definite against M. Thibault, or Antoine—she had no idea what had become of Jacques—the one glimpse she had had of their home-life had left her with a most distasteful impression. Antoine guessed her feelings and was inclined to agree with her. If anyone had ventured to criticize his father's conduct, he would certainly have protested vigorously; but at that moment, in his inmost self, he was on Mme. de Fontanin's side against his father. He had not forgotten how, the year before, after his first experience of the atmosphere of the Fontanins' home, he had for several days found that of his own home almost unbreathable.

Daniel returned. He handed Antoine a cheap-looking envelope.

"That's the first. It's the longest letter, too." He went back to his chair.

> My dear Fontanin,
>
> I write to you from my new home. You mustn't try to write to me; it's absolutely forbidden. Apart from that, everything is all right. My tutor is nice, he is kind to me, and I am working hard. And I have met quite a lot of nice fellows here. My

father and brother come to see me on Sundays. So you see I'm quite all right. I beg you, my dear Daniel, in the name of our friendship, do not judge my father too harshly; you don't know all the facts. I know he is kind and good, and he has done well to send me away from Paris, where I was wasting my time at the lycée; I see it myself now, and I'm glad. I don't give you my address—-to make sure you won't write, for if you did so it would be terrible for me here.

I will write to you again when I have a chance, my dear Daniel.

Jacques.

Antoine read the letter twice. Had he not recognized his brother's writing, he would have had difficulty in believing it came from him. Someone else had written the address on the envelope—obviously a more or less illiterate person—and there was something mean and furtive about the handwriting. Form and contents disturbed him equally. Why those lies? About the "nice fellows," for instance. Jacques was living in a cell in the famous "special annex" which M. Thibault had provided for boys of good family, and which was always empty. Jacques, he knew, never spoke to a soul except the servant who brought his meals and took him for walks, and a tutor who came from Compiègne two or three times a week. "My father and brother come to see me"! M. Thibault visited Crouy in his official capacity on the first Monday of each month, to preside over the administrative committee, and it was true that on that day, just before leaving, he always had his son brought to see him for a few minutes in the parlour. As for Antoine, he had proposed going to visit his brother during the summer holidays, but M. Thibault had put his foot down. "It's essential," he had said, "for the course of re-education your brother is undergoing, that he should be kept in absolute isolation."

His elbows propped on his knees, Antoine twiddled the letter between his fingers. His peace of mind was badly shaken and of a sudden he felt so painfully at a loss, so lonely, that he was on the point of telling everything to the enlightened woman who, by some happy chance, had crossed his path. Looking up, he saw her with her hands resting on her lap, and with a thoughtful, somehow expectant look on her face. Her eyes seemed to read his thoughts.

"Do you think we could help in any way?" she smiled. The silken whiteness of her hair made the smile and the features seem those of a still younger woman.

But, just as he was about to make the plunge, he paused, noticing Daniel's shrewd gaze intent on him. Antoine could not bear to seem irresolute, and even more disliked the idea that Mme. de Fontanin might not regard him as the man of rapid measures that he was. But to himself he gave a more congenial reason for his silence—that he could not divulge a secret Jacques was at such pains to hide. Feeling unsure of himself, he cut the awkward situation short. He rose and, as he held out his hand, assumed the impressive look he deliberately cultivated, a look implying: "No questions, please! You see the man I am! We understand each other; that's enough!"

In the street he strode ahead, repeating to himself: "Keep calm, and act with firmness!" Five or six years spent in studying science had given him the habit of casting his thoughts in ostensibly logical form. "Jacques does not complain; therefore Jacques is happy." But, inwardly, he discredited his syllogism. The press campaign against the reformatory haunted his thoughts; notably he recalled an article on "Children's Jails" that had described in detail the physical and moral degradation of the ill-fed, ill-housed boys, the corporal punishments they were subjected to, the callous treatment often meted out to them by the guards. Unconsciously he made a menacing gesture. The role of rescuer appealed to him. Cost what it might, he would get the poor boy out of it! But how? Any idea of telling his father about it or having it out with him could be dismissed; for it was his father, and the institution founded and managed by him, that he was up against. This feeling of revolt against his father was so unprecedented that at first he felt a certain embarrassment, which soon changed to pride.

He remembered what had happened the year before, the day after Jacques's return. At the earliest stage of the proceedings M. Thibault had summoned him to his study. The Abbé Vécard had just come. M. Thibault was bellowing: "The young ruffian! We've got to break his will!" He had stretched out his plump, hairy hand, had spread out the fingers, then slowly closed them, cracking the joints. A self-satisfied smile had lit up his face. "Yes, I think I've found the solution." And, after a pause, raising at last his eyelids, he had uttered the one word: "Crouy."

"What! Do you mean to send Jacques to the reformatory?" Antoine had exclaimed. A heated argument had followed. "We've got to break him in," his father had repeated, cracking his knuckles again. The Abbé had demurred. Then M. Thibault had explained the special discipline Jacques would undergo—a regime which, to hear him, was amiably benevolent, paternal. He had concluded in an unctuous tone, with measured emphasis. "In these conditions, out of reach of evil influences and purged by solitude of his baser instincts, imbued with a taste for work, he will come to his sixteenth year, and I venture to hope it will then be possible for him safely to resume his place in our family life." The priest had acquiesced: "Yes, isolation does effect marvellous cures." Impressed by his father's arguments and the priest's approval, Antoine had finished by thinking they were right. But now he could forgive neither his father nor himself.

He walked rapidly, without looking where he was going. In front of the Lion of Belfort he turned on his heel, then went striding on again, lighting cigarette after cigarette, puffing the smoke into the lamp-lit darkness. Yes, he must make haste to Crouy, strike hard, do justice… .

A woman accosted him, murmuring cajoleries. He did not answer, but continued walking down the Boulevard Saint-Michel. "I shall have justice done!" he repeated. "I'll show up the double-dealing of the directors; I'll make a public scandal and bring the boy back."

But somehow the edge of his enthusiasm had been blunted; all the time, his thoughts had been sheering off their first preoccupation, and another impulse kept cutting across his grandiose campaign. He crossed the Seine, well knowing to what place his wayward steps were taking him. After all, why not? With his nerves strung up like this, there was no point in going home to bed. He inhaled deeply, puffed out his chest, and smiled. "One's got to be a man," he thought, "to prove one's strength." As he blithely entered the furtive, ill-lit street, another rush of generous emotion carried him away. In his mind's eye he saw his resolution beaconing him to triumph. Now that he was about to realize one of the two projects that had been vying for his attention during the past quarter of an hour, the other, by the same token, seemed to him all but realized. And as, with the assurance born of habit, he pushed open the glazed door, his plans were cut and dried. "Tomorrow's Saturday—impossible to get away from the hospital. But on Sunday, Sunday morning, I'll visit the reformatory."

# II

AS THE morning express did not stop at Crouy, Antoine had to get out at Venette, the last station before Compiègne. He alighted from the train in the highest spirits. Next week he had to sit for an examination, but throughout the journey he had been unable to apply his mind to the medical manuals he had brought with him. The decisive moment was near. For the past two days he had been picturing so vividly the triumphant climax of his crusade that he almost fancied he had already effected Jacques's release, and the only problem troubling him was how he was to regain the boy's affection.

He had a mile and a half to walk along a level, sunlit road. For the first time that year after weeks of rain there was a promise of spring in the dewy fragrance of the March morning. He feasted his eyes on the tender verdure already mantling the ploughlands. Wisps of vapour lingered on the bright horizon, and the hills along the Oise glittered in the young sunlight. For a moment he was weak enough to hope he was mistaken, so pure, so calm was the countryside around him. Could this be the setting of a convict prison?

He had to cross the entire village of Crouy before reaching the reformatory. Then, suddenly, as he came round the last houses, he had a shock. Though he had never seen it and distant though it was, he could not be mistaken. There, in the midst of a chalk-white plain, ringed round on all sides, like a new graveyard, by bare, bleak walls, rose the huge building with its tiled roof, its clock-face gleaming in the sun, and endless rows of small, barred windows. It would have been taken for an ordinary prison but for the gold lettering on the cornice over the first story:

THE OSCAR THIBAULT FOUNDATION

He walked up the treeless drive leading to the penitentiary. The little windows seemed watching from afar the visitor's approach. Entering the portico, he pulled the bell-rope; a shrill clang jarred the Sabbath calm. The door opened. A brown watchdog, chained to its kennel, barked furiously. Antoine entered the courtyard, which consisted of a lawn surrounded by gravel paths and curved on the side facing the main ward. He had a feeling of being watched, but no living being was in sight except the dog, which, tugging at its chain, was barking lustily as ever. To the left of the entrance was a little chapel topped by a stone cross; on the right he saw a low building with the notice "Staff," and turned towards it. The closed door opened the moment he set foot on the step. The dog went on barking. He stepped into a hall, with a tiled floor and yellow walls and furnished with new chairs; it reminded him of a convent parlour. The place was overheated. A life-sized plaster bust of M. Thibault, giving an impression of enormous bulk under the low ceiling, adorned the right-hand wall. On the opposite wall a humble black crucifix, garnished with a sprig of box, seemed to be playing second fiddle to it. Antoine remained standing, on the defensive. No, he had not been wrong! The whole place reeked of the prison-house.

At last, in the wall furthest from him, a hatch was opened and a guard put out his head. Antoine threw down his own card and one of his father's, and curtly told the man he wished to see the superintendent.

Nearly five minutes passed.

Annoyed by the delay, Antoine was just about to start on a round of exploration, unaccompanied, when a light step sounded in the corridor and a bespectacled, plump, fair-haired young man ran up to him with little dancing steps. He was in brown flannel pyjamas and wearing Turkish slippers. All smiles, he held out both hands in welcome.

"Good morning, doctor. What a happy surprise! Your brother will be so delighted, *so* delighted to see you. Of course I know you well; your father, the Founder, often speaks of his grown-up doctor son. And besides there's a family resemblance. Oh, yes," he laughed, "I assure you there's a likeness. But do come to my office, please. And forgive me for not introducing myself before; I'm Falsme, the superintendent here."

He shepherded Antoine towards his office, shuffling his feet and following close behind with his arms extended and fingers spread, as if he expected Antoine to slip or stumble and wanted to be sure to catch him before he fell.

He made Antoine take a seat and himself sat at his desk.

"Is the Founder in good health?" he asked in a high-pitched voice. "What an extraordinary man he is—he never seems to get older! Such a pity he couldn't come today as well!"

Antoine cast a mistrustful glance round the room, then scanned without amenity the young man's face, which for all its pink-and-white complexion had a Chinese cast: behind the gold-rimmed spectacles the two small slanted eyes seemed twinkling and beaming with perpetual joy. The voluble welcome had taken him off his guard, and it upset his calculations to find that the stern prison warden he had pictured was a smiling young man in pyjamas instead of the grim-faced martinet—or, at best, the prim pedagogue—he had expected to confront. It was an effort for him to recover his composure.

"By Jove!" M. Faîsme suddenly exclaimed. "It's just struck me: you've arrived in the middle of mass. All our youngsters are in chapel, including your brother, of course. What's to be done?" He consulted his watch. "There's another twenty minutes, half an hour, perhaps, if there are many communions—and that's quite possible. The Founder must have told you; we are particularly fortunate in our confessor: he's quite a young priest with go-ahead ideas and any amount of tact. Since he's been here the religious tone of the institution has wonderfully improved. I'm so sorry to keep you waiting, but really I don't see how it can be helped."

Mindful of the investigation he proposed to carry out, Antoine made no show of friendliness.

"As the buildings are empty for the moment," he said, standing up and fixing his eyes on the little man, "I presume there would be no objection to my having a look round the institution. I've heard it so much discussed ever since I was a boy that I'd like to have a nearer view of it."

"Really?" The superintendent seemed surprised. "Nothing could be simpler, of course," he added with a smile, but made no sign of moving. For a moment he seemed lost in thought, the smile still lingering on his lips. "Really, you know, the buildings aren't particularly interesting; more like a miniature barracks than anything else. And when I've said that, you know as much about them as I do."

Antoine remained on his feet.

"Still, it would interest me," he repeated. The superintendent stared at him, his little slotted eyes twinkling with amused incredulity. "I mean what I say," Antoine added in a determined voice.

"In that case, doctor, I'll be delighted… . Please give me time to put on a coat and shoes and I'll be with you."

He went out. Antoine heard an electric bell ring. Then a big bell in the courtyard clanged five times. "Aha!" he thought. "That's the alarm; the enemy is within the gates!" Unable to bring himself to sit down, he walked to the window; the glass was frosted. "Steady now!" he adjured himself. "And keep your eyes open. The first thing's to make sure. Then to act. That's the line to take."

After a good while M. Faîsme returned.

They went out together.

"You see here our main quadrangle!" he said, turning the pompous nomenclature with a laugh. The watchdog started barking again; he ran up to it and gave it a violent kick in the ribs that sent it slinking back into the kennel.

"Are you anything of a gardener? But of course a doctor must know his way about in botany, eh?" He halted, beaming, in the middle of the little lawn. "Do give me your advice. How'm I to hide that bit of wall? What about ivy? Only it would take years, wouldn't it?"

Ignoring the question, Antoine walked on to the main building. First they visited the ground floor. Antoine went in front; nothing escaped his observant eye, and he made a point of opening every door without exception. The upper half of the walls was whitewashed; up to the height of six feet they were tarred black. All the windows, like those in the office, had frosted glass, and here there were bars as well. Antoine tried to open a window, but a special key was necessary; the superintendent produced one from his pocket and turned the latch. Antoine was struck by the dexterity of his short, .fat, yellow fingers. He cast a shrewd exploring glance into the inner court, which was quite empty—a large rectangle of dry, well-trodden mud without a single tree and enclosed by high walls topped with broken glass.

M. Faîsme described with gusto the uses of the different rooms: class-rooms and shops for carpentry, metalwork, electricity, and so forth. The rooms were small, clean, and tidy. In the refectory servants were just finishing clearing the deal tables; an acrid smell came from the sinks in the corners.

"Each boy goes to the sink after the meal to wash his bowl, mug, and spoon. They never have knives, of course, nor even forks." When Antoine gave him a puzzled look, he added with a grin: "Nothing with a point, you know!"

On the first floor there were more class-rooms, more workshops, and a shower-bath which did not seem much used, but of which the superintendent was evidently particularly proud. He bustled from room to room, flapping his arms and prattling away. Now and then he would stop to push back a carpenter's bench, pick up a nail from the floor, turn off a dripping tap, set perfect order in each room he entered.

On the second floor were the dormitories. They were of two sorts. The greater number contained ten low bedsteads, spread with grey blankets and arranged in rows; each was fitted with a kit-rack as in French military barracks, which these resembled, except that in the centre of each room was a sort of iron cage enclosed in fine-meshed wire netting.

"Do you shut them up in that?" Antoine inquired.

M. Faîsme flung up his arms in a gesture of comical dismay, then began laughing again.

"Certainly not! That's where the watchman sleeps. It's quite simple; he puts his bed plumb in the middle, at an equal distance from each wall. In that way he can see and hear everything that goes on, in perfect safety. And he has an alarm-bell, too; the wires go under the floor."

The other sort of dormitory consisted of rows of adjoining cells, built of solid stone and barred like the animal-cages in a menagerie. M. Faîsme had stopped on the threshold. Now and then his smile had a pensive, disillusioned air which gave his doll-like features the melancholy that pervades the Buddha's face in certain statues.

"Alas, doctor," he said, "it's in these cells we have to lodge our 'hard cases.' The boys, I mean, who come to us too late to be re-educated; I'm afraid there's little to be said for them. Some boys have vice in the blood—don't you agree? Well, there's nothing for it but to shut them up by themselves at night."

Antoine pressed his face to the bars and peered into the gloom of one of the cells. He could just make out an unmade pallet bed and walls covered with obscene drawings and inscriptions. Instinctively he drew back.

"Don't look, it's too distressing," the superintendent sighed, drawing him away. "Here you have the central corridor where the watchman on duty patrols all night. The light isn't put out here, and he doesn't go to bed. Though they're securely locked up, the little rascals would be quite capable of giving us a lot of trouble, take my word for it!" He shook his head mournfully, then suddenly started laughing; his slotted eyes grew narrower still and all trace of compunction had left his face. "Yes," he added with an air of naivete, "it takes all sorts to make a world, you know."

Antoine was so much interested in what he saw that he had forgotten most of the questions he had prepared in advance. One, however, he remembered now.

"How do you punish them? I'd like to see your punishment cells."

M. Faîsme stepped back a pace, his eyes wide open, flapping his hands in consternation.

"Come, come, doctor, what do you take us for? This isn't a convict prison. Punishment cells, indeed! We haven't any, thank God! For one thing, the Founder would never tolerate such methods."

Silenced and baffled, Antoine had to endure the irony that twinkled in the little narrow eyes, whose lashes flickered humorously behind the glasses. He was beginning to End the role he had assumed—of scrutiny and suspicion—rather irksome. Nothing he had seen encouraged him to maintain his attitude of hostility. Moreover, he had a feeling that the superintendent might have guessed the invidious motive that had brought him to Crouy. Still it was hard to know, so genuine seemed the little man's simplicity despite the occasional flashes of mockery that glinted in the corners of his eyes.

He stopped laughing, came up to Antoine, and put his hand on his arm.

"You were joking, weren't you? You know as well as I do what comes of overdoing discipline; it leads to rebellion or, what is still worse, hypocrisy. Our Founder made a fine speech on the subject at the Paris Congress, in the year of the Great Exhibition."

He had lowered his voice and there was a look of special understanding on his face as he gazed at the young man, a look implying that he and Antoine belonged to an élite, capable of discussing such educational problems without falling into the errors of the common herd. Antoine felt flattered, and his favourable impressions grew stronger.

"It's true that in the courtyard, just as in a military barracks, there's a small shed that the architect described on his plan as 'punishment cells.' "

"Yes?"

"But we only use it for storing coal and potatoes. What's the use of punishment cells? You get so much more by persuasion."

"Really?"

With a subtle smile the superintendent placed his hand on Antoine's arm.

"Let's get it clear," he said. "What I call 'persuasion,' I prefer to tell you right away, is the deprivation of certain items of the daily diet. Our young folk are always greedy. That's only natural at their age, isn't it? Dry bread, doctor, has a persuasive power you'd never suspect; only you must know how to use it—it's essential not to isolate the boy whom we're trying to reform. That, by the way, shows you how little the solitary cell enters into our method. No, it's in a corner of the dining-hall that the youngster eats his hunk of stale bread, at noon, when the best meal of the day is served, with the smell of a nice steaming dish of stew in his nostrils and with all the others tucking it away under his eyes. That's our method, and it never fails. At that age they thin down in no time; in a fortnight or three weeks I've broken in even the most stubborn cases. Persuasion—there's nothing like it!" His eyes were round with satisfaction. "And never have I had to take other measures; I've never lifted a finger against any of the young folk in my charge."

His face was shining with pride and benevolence. He really seemed to love his youthful miscreants, even the toughest.

They went down the stairs again. M. Faîsme took out his watch.

"To finish up, let me show you a truly edifying spectacle. You'll tell the Founder, I hope, and I'm sure he'll be pleased to hear about it."

They crossed the garden and entered the chapel. M. Faîsme sprinkled holy water. Antoine saw the backs of some sixty boys in grey overalls, kneeling in strict alignment on the stone floor, motionless. Four of the staff, stalwart figures in blue uniforms with red braid, marched up and down the aisle, keeping their eyes fixed on the boys. Attended by two acolytes, the priest at the altar was just concluding the service.

"Where's Jacques?" Antoine whispered.

The superintendent pointed to the gallery beneath which they were standing and tip-toed back towards the porch.

"That's where your brother always sits," he said as soon as they were outside. "He's alone there; that's to say, only the young man who looks after him is with him. By the way, you might tell your father that a new servant, the man we spoke to him about, has been allotted to Jacques. He took up the post a week ago. Léon, the man whom Jacques had before, was getting too old for the job, and we've detailed him to supervise a workroom. The new man's a young Lorrainer, a very, very decent fellow. He's just ended his military service; used to be the colonel's orderly, and his references were excellent. It'll be less boring for your brother on his walks, don't you think so? Good heavens, here I am chattering away to you and the boys are coming out of the chapel."

The dog began to bark furiously. M. Faîsme reduced it to silence, adjusted his glasses, and took his stand in the centre of the big quadrangle.

Both leaves of the chapel-door had been thrown open and, three by three, with the attendants beside them, the boys were filing out, keeping perfect step, like soldiers on parade. All were bare-headed and wearing rope-soled shoes, which gave them the noiseless step of gymnasts; their overalls were clean and held in at the waist by leather belts, the buckles of which flashed in the sun. The oldest were seventeen or eighteen, the youngest ten or eleven. Most had pale complexions, downcast eyes, and a look of calm quite out of keeping with their age. But Antoine, though he scrutinized them with the utmost attention, could not detect a single questionable glance, not one unsavoury smile, nor even any trace of sullenness. Those boys did not look "hard cases," and, he could but own to himself, they did not look like oppressed victims either.

When the little procession had vanished into the building and the sound of muffled footsteps on the wooden stairs had died away, he turned to M. Faîsme, who seemed to be waiting for his comment on the scene.

"An excellent turn-out," he said.

The little man said nothing, but gently rubbed one plump palm against the other, as if he were soaping them, while his eyes, sparkling with pride behind the glasses, conveyed his silent gratitude.

At last, when the quadrangle was quite empty, Jacques appeared outside the sunlit porch.

At first Antoine wondered if it was really he. He had changed so greatly, grown so much taller, that Antoine all but failed to recognize him. He was not wearing uniform but a lounge suit, a felt hat, and an overcoat thrown over his shoulders. He was followed by a fair-haired, thick-set young man of about twenty, who was not wearing the official uniform. They came down the steps together. Neither seemed to have noticed Antoine and the superintendent. Jacques was walking composedly, his eyes fixed on the ground, and it was not till he was within a few yards of M. Faîsme that, raising his head, he stopped, displayed astonishment, and briskly took off his hat. His demeanour was completely natural, yet Antoine had a suspicion that his surprise was simulated. Jacques's expression remained calm and, though he was smiling, did not seem to convey any real pleasure. Antoine held out his hand; his pleasure, too, was feigned.

"Well, this is a nice surprise, Jacques, isn't it?" the superintendent exclaimed. "But I'm going to scold you, my dear boy. You should put on your overcoat properly. It's chilly up in the gallery and you might catch cold."

Jacques had turned away from his brother as soon as he heard M. Faîsme speak and was looking the superintendent in the face with a respectful, remarkably attentive expression, as if he were trying to grasp some underlying meaning that the words might be intended to convey. Then promptly, without answering, he slipped the overcoat on.

"By Jove!" Antoine sounded almost startled. "It's amazing how you've shot up." He could not take his eyes off his brother, trying to analyse the complete change that had come over the boy's demeanour, face, and general appearance, and his surprise hampered his

spontaneity.

"Would you like to stay outside for a bit?" the superintendent amiably suggested. "It's such a nice day, isn't it? Jacques can take you to his room when you've done a few turns round the garden."

Antoine hesitated. His eyes were asking his brother: "What about it?"

Jacques made no sign. Antoine took it to mean that he would rather not stay where he was, in full view of the reformatory windows.

"No," he said, and turned to Jacques again. "We'll be better in your room, won't we?"

"As you like," the superintendent smiled. "But first of all I want to show you one more thing; you really must have a look at all our boarders, while you're about it. Come along, Jacques."

Jacques followed M. Faîsme, who, his arms extended, laughing like a schoolboy playing a practical joke, was shepherding Antoine towards a shelter built against the wall of the porter's lodge. There were a dozen little rabbit-hutches. M. Falsme, it seemed, had a passion for small-stock raising.

"This litter was born last Monday," he explained gleefully, "and look, they're opening their eyes already, dear little things. In this hutch are my buck-rabbits. Have a good look at this one, doctor; he's a real 'hard case.' " He plunged his arm into a hutch and hauled out by the ears a big silver Champagne, kicking violently.

There was a ring of boyish merriment in his laugh; it seemed impossible to think ill of the little man. Then Antoine remembered the dormitory above and its hutches barred with iron.

The plaintive smile of a misunderstood man came to M. Faîsme's face. "Good heavens," he said, "here I am chattering away, and I can see you're only listening out of pure politeness, eh? I'll take you as far as Jacques's door, and leave you. Come, Jacques, show us the way."

Jacques went in front. Antoine overtook him and put a hand on his shoulder. He was trying vainly to conjure up a picture of the small, nervous, weakly, short-legged urchin he had gone to retrieve at Marseille less than a year before.

"Why, you're as tall as I am!"

From the shoulder his hand moved up to the boy's neck. It was as thin and frail as the neck of a bird. Indeed all the boy's limbs seemed to have outgrown their strength, to be extraordinarily fragile. The elongated wrists protruded from the sleeves, the trousers left his ankles almost unclad, and there was a stiffness, an awkwardness in his way of walking, paradoxically combined with a certain adolescent suppleness, that was quite new to Antoine.

The rooms reserved for the special inmates were in an annex to the administrative offices and could be approached only through them. Five identical rooms gave onto a corridor the walls of which were painted yellow. M. Faîsme explained that as Jacques was the only "special" and the other rooms were unoccupied, the young man who looked after him slept in one, while the others were used as storerooms.

"And here's our prisoner's cell," he said, giving Jacques a playful tap with his plump finger; the boy smiled and drew back to let him enter.

Antoine inspected the room with eager curiosity. It might have been a bedroom in some small, unpretentious, but pleasantly appointed hotel. The wallpaper had a floral pattern and there was a fair amount of light, though it came only from above through two fanlights of frosted glass criss-crossed by iron bars. They were immediately beneath the ceiling and, the room being lofty, nearly ten feet above the floor. Sunlight did not enter, but the room was warmed, not to say overheated, by the heating-plant of the establishment. The furniture consisted of a pitchpine wardrobe, two cane chairs, and a black table covered with an array of books and dictionaries. The little bed was smooth and trim as a billiard-table, and had been freshly laid with clean sheets. The wash-basin stood on a clean cloth and there were several immaculate towels on the towel-rail.

A minute inspection of the room gave the final blow to Antoine's preconceived ideas about the institution. Everything he had seen during the past hour had been the exact opposite of what he had expected. Jacques was effectively segregated from the other boys and treated with every consideration; the superintendent was a good fellow, as unlike the warden of a prison as one could well imagine. In fact, all M. Thibault had said was true. Obstinate though he was, Antoine was being forced to retract his suspicions one by one.

He caught M. Faîsme's gaze intent on him.

"Well, I must say you're pretty comfortable here," he remarked, rather abruptly, turning to Jacques.

Jacques made no reply. He was taking off his hat and coat, which the servant took from him and hung up on the pegs.

"Your brother has just said that you seem comfortable here," the superintendent repeated.

Jacques swung round, with a polite, good-mannered air his brother had never seen him assume before. "Yes, sir," he said. "Very comfortable indeed."

"No, don't let us exaggerate," M. Faismc smiled. "It's all very primitive really; we only insist it shall be clean. In any case, it's Arthur we must compliment," he added, turning to the servant. "That bed does you credit, my lad!"

Arthur's face lit up. Antoine, who was watching him, found himself making a friendly gesture towards the young man. He had a bullet head, pale eyes, and smooth features, and there was something frank and forthright in his smile and gaze. He had stayed beside the door and was tugging at his moustache, which seemed almost colourless against his sun-tanned cheeks.

"So that's the grim guard I had pictured—creeping about with a dark lantern and a bunch of keys!" Antoine was saying to himself, and could not help laughing at his mistake. Then he went up to the books and, still laughing, ran his eyes over them.

"Sallust, I see. Are you making good progress with your Latin?" he asked, a cheerful smile still lingering on his face.

It was M. Faîsme who answered his question.

"Perhaps I shouldn't say it in front of him," he began with feigned reluctance and a flutter of his eyelashes in Jacques's direction, "but I don't see why I shouldn't tell you his tutor is very pleased with his progress. We work our eight hours a day," he continued in a more serious tone. He went up to the blackboard and straightened it while he went on talking. "Still that doesn't prevent us from going every day, whatever the weather—your worthy father attaches much importance to it—for a good long two hours' tramp with Arthur. They've both good legs, and I leave them free to choose the walks they like. With old Léon it was another matter; I suspect they didn't cover much ground, but they made up for it by gathering herbs along the hedgerows. I should tell you old Léon was a pharmacist's

assistant in his youth and knows all about plants, not to mention their Latin names. Jacques must have learned quite a lot from him. Still I must say I'd rather see them taking long walks in the country—much better for Jacques's health, isn't it?"

Antoine had turned to his brother several times while M. Faîsme was speaking. Jacques seemed to be listening in a dream; now and then he had to make an effort to follow, and at these moments a look of vague distress crossed his face, his lips parted, and his eyelids quivered.

"There I am again, babbling away, and it's ages since Jacques had a chance of seeing his big brother." M. Faîsme backed towards the door with little, friendly gestures. "Are you going back by the eleven o'clock train?" he asked.

That had not been Antoine's intention, but M. Faîsme's tone implied it was the obvious thing to do, and, moreover, he felt only too glad of the pretext for an early escape. He was conscious that the dreary atmosphere of the place and Jacques's indifference were getting on his nerves. And, in any case, he had learned what he wanted to learn. What was the use of staying on?

"Yes," he replied. "Unfortunately I must get back to Paris early, for my afternoon visits."

"There's nothing to regret; the next train doesn't leave till late in the day. Well, so long, doctor!"

The brothers were alone. For a moment both felt embarrassed.

"Take the chair," Jacques said, and moved towards the bed as if to seat himself on it. Then he noticed the second chair, changed his mind, and, offering it to Antoine, repeated: "Take the chair" in a natural tone, as if he were saying: "Do sit down!"

Nothing of this byplay had escaped Antoine; his suspicions were aroused.

"So you have only one chair as a rule," he observed.

"Yes. But Arthur's lent us his today, as he does when my tutor comes."

Antoine did not press the point.

"Well, they seem to do you pretty well here." He cast another glance around the room. Pointing to the clean sheets and towels, he added: "Do they change the linen often?"

"Sundays."

Antoine had been speaking in the crisp, cheerful tone that was usual with him, but somehow in this echoing room, in the atmosphere created by Jacques's apathy, it sounded incisive, almost aggressive.

"Just think," he said, "I was worried about you, I hardly know why. I was afraid they might be treating you badly here."

Jacques gazed at him with surprise, and smiled. Antoine kept his eyes fixed on his brother's face.

"Well, now, honestly, between ourselves, you've nothing to complain of?"

"Nothing."

"Now that I'm here, isn't there anything I could fix up for you with the superintendent?"

"What sort of thing?"

"How can I tell? Think, now."

Jacques seemed to ponder, smiled again, then shook his head.

"No. As you can see, everything's quite all right."

His voice had changed, like everything else about him; it was a man's voice now, with an agreeable, if rather muffled, resonance, which came as a surprise from one so obviously a mere boy.

Antoine gazed at him again. "Yes, Jacques, how you've changed! No, 'changed' isn't really the word for it; you're no longer the same, not a bit, not in any way."

He still kept his eyes on Jacques, trying to recognize in the unfamiliar face the features he had known. There was still the same reddish hair, a little darker and browner now, but still coarse and growing low on the forehead; there was the same narrow, ill-formed nose, the same cracked lips, shaded now by a faint fringe of down; the same heavy jaw, but more massive than in the past; and the same protuberant ears that seemed tugging at the mouth, keeping it stretched. Yet nothing of it all was really like the youngster of the day before yesterday. "It looks as if his temperament has changed as well," Antoine mused. "He used to be so changeable, always on edge —and now he looks half asleep, as if his face had been ironed out! Yes, he used to be a nervous type, and now he's gone lymphatic."

"Stand up for a moment," he said.

Jacques submitted to the examination with an amiable smile, but there was no warmth in it. The pupils of his eyes seemed misted over.

Antoine felt his arms and legs.

"Goodness, how you've shot up! Sure it isn't telling on your health?"

Jacques shook his head. Antoine was holding the boy in front of him, by the wrists. He was struck by the paleness of the freckled cheeks and the pouches under the eyes.

"None too healthy, your colour," he went on, with a touch of seriousness. He frowned, was on the point of saying something more, but stopped.

Suddenly the sight of Jacques's submissive, expressionless face had revived all the suspicions he had vaguely felt when he first had seen Jacques in the quadrangle.

"I suppose they told you I was waiting for you after mass, didn't they?" he asked abruptly.

Jacques locked at him uncomprehendingly.

"When you came out of the chapel," Antoine persisted, "did you know that I was here?"

"Certainly not. How could I know?" Jacques's smile conveyed candid amazement.

Antoine decided to drop the subject. "Well, I rather thought they had… . Can I smoke here?" he asked, to change the subject.

Jacques looked at him anxiously. Antoine held out his cigarette-case.

"Have one?"

"No, thanks." A shadow seemed to settle on his face.

Antoine was at a loss what to say. As usually happens when someone wants to prolong a conversation with a taciturn companion, Antoine racked his brains to think of questions he might put.

"So really and truly," he began, "there's nothing you need. You've got all you want?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Is your bed comfortable? Have you enough blankets?"

"Oh, yes; I'm too warm sometimes."

"What about your tutor? Is he decent to you?"

"Very."

"But doesn't it bore you rather, working like this, all by yourself?"

"No."

"How do you spend the evenings?"

"I go to bed after dinner, at eight o'clock."

"When do you get up?"

"When the bell rings, at half-past six."

"Does the confessor come to see you sometimes?"

"Yes."

"Do you like him?"

Jacques stared blankly at Antoine. He did not understand the question, and made no answer.

"And does the superintendent come as well?"

"Yes, often."

"He looks a good sort. Do the boys like him?"

"I don't know. I expect so."

"You never meet the—the others?"

"Never."

At each question Jacques, whose eyes were constantly lowered, gave a slight shiver, as if it were a strain for him to jump like this from one subject to another.

"How about your poems? Do you still write poetry?" Antoine asked with a smile.

"Oh, no."

"Why not?"

Jacques shrugged his shoulders; a placid smile came to his lips and lingered there for some moments. It was the sort of smile Antoine would have expected had his question been: "Do you still play with a hoop?"

In despair Antoine switched the conversation round to Daniel. Jacques was not prepared for that; he flushed a little.

"How do you expect me to know anything about him?" he said. "We don't get letters here."

"But," Antoine went on, "don't you ever write to him?" He kept his eyes fixed on his brother.

The boy smiled as he had done when Antoine had referred to his poems, and made a faint gesture as if to wave away the topic.

"It's ancient history, all that. Don't let's talk of it any more."

What did he mean by that? If he had said: "No, I've never written to him," Antoine would have bluntly given him the lie, and felt a secret pleasure in doing so, for Jacques's air of apathy was beginning to irritate him. But Jacques had eluded his question, and there had been a melancholy finality in his tone that had silenced Antoine. Just then he fancied he saw Jacques's eyes grow suddenly intent on something behind himself, by the door; and, in his mood of latent irritation, he felt all his suspicions come crowding back. The door had a window in it, no doubt to make it possible to see from outside what was going on in the room, and over the door was a grating through which what was said could be overheard from outside.

"There's someone in the corridor, isn't there?" Antoine asked bluntly, but in a low voice.

Jacques stared at him as if he had gone mad.

"Someone in the corridor? What do you mean? Sometimes people go by. Just now I saw old Léon passing."

There was a knock at the door and Léon came in to be introduced to the big brother. Without more ado he sat down on the edge of the table.

"I hope you find him fit, sir. Ain't he shot up since the autumn?"

He was laughing. He looked a typical old-school French sergeant-major. He had a big, drooping moustache, and tanned cheeks which his jovial belly-laugh suffused with a glow of blood that ramified across them in a network of red veins, spreading into the whites of his eyes and blurring their expression, which normally, it seemed, was one of fatherly good humour with a spice of mischief in it.

"They've packed me off to the workshops," he said to Antoine, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders. "And I'd got so used to this young gentleman! Ah, well," he added, as he moved away, "it's no use crying over spilt milk, as they say… . Give my respects to M. Thibault, if it ain't too much trouble, sir. He knows me well, does your old dad."

"What a fine old chap!" Antoine exclaimed when he had gone.

Then he tried to get their talk under way again.

"I could take him a letter from you, if you want to send one," he said. When Jacques stared at him uncomprehendingly, he added: "Wouldn't you like to write a word to Fontanin?"

Yet again he was trying to summon up to the boy's listless face some hint of real feeling, some memory of the past; and again he failed. Jacques merely shook his head, unsmiling.

"No, thanks. I've nothing to say to him. All that's ancient history."

Antoine left it at that. Inwardly he was furious. Moreover, it must be getting late; he took out his watch.

"Half-past ten. In five minutes I must go."

Jacques suddenly looked ill at ease, as if there were something he wanted to say to his brother. He went on to inquire about Antoine's health, the time the train went, his medical examinations. And when Antoine rose he was struck by the tone in which Jacques sighed.

"What? So soon? Do stay a little longer."

He fancied then that the boy might have been put off by his coldness, that the visit might have given him more pleasure than he chose to evince.

"Are you glad I came?" he murmured awkwardly.

But Jacques's thoughts seemed far away. He gave a little start, as if surprised, and answered with a polite smile:

"Yes, of course. Very glad, thank you."

"Righto, I'll try to come again. Goodbye till then." He was feeling really annoyed. He looked at his young brother again, full in the face; all his perceptive powers were on the alert, and his emotions, too, were stirred.

"I often think of you, and I must say I'm feeling worried—that you mayn't be happy here." They were near the door. Antoine grasped Jacques's hand. "You'd tell me if you weren't, wouldn't you?"

Jacques looked embarrassed. He made an impulsive movement, as if at last he were about to confide in Antoine. Then he seemed to come to a quick decision.

"Antoine, I wish you'd give something to Arthur, the servant. He's so obliging, you know." Antoine was so taken aback that he did not answer at once. Jacques went on in a pleading voice: "You'll give him a tip, won't you?"

"But," Antoine replied, "mightn't it lead to … complications?"

"No, of course not. When you're going, say goodbye to him nicely and give him a small tip. Please, Antoine!" His attitude was almost imploring.

"Of course I will. But I want to know the truth about you, and I want a straight answer. Are you unhappy here?"

"No, certainly not!" There was a hint of vexation in Jacques's voice. Then he added in a lower tone: "How much will you give him?"

"Haven't an idea. What do you think? How about ten francs? Or would you rather twenty?"

"Oh, yes, twenty!" Jacques seemed delighted, but embarrassed at the same time. "Thank you, Antoine." And he gripped affectionately the hand his brother gave him.

Arthur was going along the corridor as Antoine went out. He took the tip without demur, and his frank, slightly childish face flushed with pleasure. He escorted Antoine to the superintendent's office.

"It's a quarter to eleven," M. Faîsme said. "You've got time enough, but you must start at once."

They crossed the vestibule in which the Founder's bust lorded it superbly. And now, when Antoine saw it again, his sense of irony was quelled. For he realized now how well founded was his father's pride in this institution, which he had built up unaided; and he felt a vicarious pride in being his father's son.

M. Faîsme accompanied him to the gate, begging him to present his respects to M. Thibault. As he spoke, he never ceased laughing, puckering his eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. The hands he pressed almost affectionately round Antoine's hand were plump and yielding as a woman's. At last Antoine managed to free himself. Looking back, he saw the little man standing in the road, bare-headed in the sunlight, still laughing and wagging his head with every sign of amity.

"Really, I'm as silly as a hysterical schoolgirl, letting my imagination run away with me like that!" Antoine was saying to himself as he walked to the station. "That show is excellently run, and Jacques isn't a bit unhappy.

"And the silliest thing," he suddenly thought, "is that I wasted my time cross-examining the boy instead of having a friendly chat with him."

He was almost inclined to believe his brother had been positively glad to see the last of him. "But it's a bit his own fault," he concluded with some exasperation; "he seemed so … so callous!" Still he was sorry he had failed to make the first advances.

Antoine did not keep a mistress and was satisfied with casual adventure. But. he was twenty-four, and he sometimes felt an almost painful yearning for the nearness of some weaker being on whom he could lavish his compassion, whom he could protect and shield. His affection for Jacques was growing stronger with every step he took away from him. And now—when would he see him again? On the least pretext he would have turned back.

He walked with his eyes to the ground, to escape the glare of the morning sun. When, after a while, he raised them again, he saw he had missed his way. Some children showed him a short cut through the fields. He quickened his pace. "Supposing I missed the train," he thought, "what should I do?" Playing with the idea, he pictured his return to the reformatory; he would spend the day with Jacques, would tell him of his fantastic fears, and this journey he had kept secret from their father. And this time he would play the part of a real confidant, a comrade, and remind the boy of the scene in the cab on their return from Marseille, and how that night he had felt they might become real friends. His desire to miss the train became so urgent that he slackened his pace, though he had not yet come to an actual decision. Suddenly he heard the engine whistle, and a plume of smoke rose on his left, above the clump of trees. Unthinking, he began to run. The station was in sight. He had his ticket in his pocket, had only to jump into a car, running across the rails, if necessary. His head thrown back, his elbows pressed in to his sides like a professional sprinter, he took deep breaths of the keen air. Proud of his athletic fitness, he felt certain he would get there on time.

But he had reckoned without the embankment. To reach the station the road made a bend, passing under a little bridge. Vainly he made a spurt, getting the last ounce out of his muscles; when he came out on the far side of the bridge, the train was already moving out of the station. He had missed it by about a hundred yards.

Such was his pride that he would not admit he had been beaten in the race; he preferred to think he had missed the train on purpose. "I could still jump into the caboose if I wanted to," he thought, "but that would settle things peremptorily; then it would be impossible for me to see Jacques again." He stopped, pleased with his decision.

Immediately all he had been picturing took concrete form; he would lunch at the inn, go back after lunch to the reformatory, and spend the whole day with his brother.

# III

ANTOINE was back at the reformatory gate a little before one. M. Faîsme was just going out, and was so taken aback that for a few seconds he seemed like a man of stone, but for the little eyes twinkling as usual behind his glasses. Antoine explained, what had happened. Only then did the superintendent burst out laughing and regain his wonted loquacity.

Antoine explained that he would like to take his brother out for the afternoon, for a walk.

The superintendent looked dubious. "That's a bit of a problem. The regulations, you know… ."

But Antoine pressed his point with such insistence that the man gave in.

"Only I must ask you to explain the particular circumstances to the Founder… . Well, I'll go and fetch Jacques."

"I'll come with you," Antoine said.

He regretted it; they arrived at an unfortunate moment. They had scarcely entered the corridor when Antoine came on his brother squatting, for all the world to see, in the retreat known to the staff as the *vater-closette*. The door was being held open by Arthur, who was leaning against it, smoking a pipe.

Antoine walked quickly past and entered Jacques's room. M. Faîsme was rubbing his hands with an air of jubilation.

"You see!" he said. "The boys we look after are looked after—even there!"

Jacques came to his room. Antoine had expected he would seem embarrassed, but nothing of the sort. Jacques was buttoning up his clothes quite unconcernedly as he entered and his face was expressionless; he did not even seem surprised at Antoine's return. M. Faîsme explained that he would permit Jacques to be out with his brother until six. Jacques watched his face as if he wanted to be sure of understanding exactly what he meant, but made no comment.

"Now I really must fly, if you'll excuse me," M. Faîsme said in his brisk falsetto voice. "There's a meeting of my Municipal Council. Would you believe it, I'm the Mayor here!" He was roaring with laughter, as if he had cracked a joke of the first order, as he vanished through the door. Even Antoine was infected by his merriment.

Jacques dressed composedly. Antoine was struck by Arthur's attentiveness to Jacques as he handed him his clothes. When he volunteered to give his shoes an extra shine, Jacques made no objection.

The room had already lost the well-kept aspect that had so favourably impressed Antoine in the morning. He tried to discover why. The luncheon-tray was still on the table; there were an empty mug, a dirty plate, bread-crumbs. The clean linen had disappeared; a single soiled hand-towel hung on the rail; under the basin was a square of dirty, tattered oilcloth. The white bed-linen had been replaced by rough, unbleached, shabby-looking sheets. And suddenly all his suspicions were reawakened. But now he refrained from asking questions.

They set out onto the high road side by side.

"Where shall we go?" Antoine asked in a cheerful tone. "You don't know Compiègne? It's only about two miles' walk, along the banks of the Oise. Like to have a look at it?"

Jacques agreed. He seemed decided to agree with everything his brother proposed.

Antoine slipped his arm through his brother's and fell into step with him.

"What did you think of the towel trick?" he asked. He looked at Jacques, and laughed.

"The towel trick?" his brother repeated blankly.

"Don't you remember? This morning, while I was being trotted round the place, they took advantage of it to lay your bed with clean sheets and hang nice clean towels by your washstand. Very clever! Unluckily I turned up again, like a bad penny! One in the eye for them!"

Jacques stopped abruptly, a faint, uneasy smile on his lips.

"Really one would think you want to find fault with everything that goes on at the institution," he blurted out, his deep voice quivering a little.

He fell silent for a while and continued walking at his brother's side. A moment later he spoke again, obviously forcing himself to do so, as if it bored him desperately having to enlarge on so futile a topic.

"You don't realize, Antoine. It's quite simple, really. The linen is changed on the first and third Sundays of each month. Arthur, who has been looking after me for the last ten days, had changed the sheets and towels last Sunday, so he thought it was his duty to change them again this morning, as it was a Sunday. The people at the linen-room told him he had made a mistake, so he had to take back the clean linen, which I'm not due to get till next week." Again he fell silent, gazing at the landscape.

A bad start! Antoine applied himself to turn their conversation into another channel, but he was still feeling annoyed at his clumsiness; somehow he could not strike the note of everyday good-fellowship he wanted. Jacques answered briefly, yes or no, to Antoine's questions, and did not show the slightest interest. At last he spoke, of his own accord.

"Please, Antoine, don't mention the business about the towels to the superintendent; it would only get Arthur into trouble over nothing at all."

"All right."

"Nor to Papa, either," Jacques added.

"I'll tell nobody, don't worry. As a matter of fact it had passed out of my mind. Now, look here, Jacques," he went on, "I'm going to tell you the truth. Just imagine, I'd got it into my head, I don't know why, that this was a rotten place, that you were having a bad time here."

Jacques turned a little and examined his brother's face with a serious expression.

"I spent the morning nosing round," Antoine went on. "Finally, I saw I'd been mistaken. Then I pretended to miss my train. You see, I didn't want to go without having had time for a good talk with you."

Jacques made no reply. Did he relish the prospect of a "good talk"? Antoine felt uncertain and, fearing to make a false step, kept silent.

The road fell steeply towards the river, and they began to walk ahead more briskly. Presently they came to a bend of the river, which was converted at this point into a canal and spanned by a narrow iron bridge, crossing a lock. Three empty barges, their fat brown hulls almost entirely above the water-level, were floating on the all but stagnant stream.

"How'd you like the idea of a trip in a barge?" Antoine asked. "It would be fun dropping down through the morning mists, between the poplars on the banks, stopping at the locks now and then— wouldn't it? And, in the evening, at sunset, smoking a cigarette in the bows, thinking of nothing, dangling one's legs over the water… . By the way, do you still go in for drawing?"

Jacques gave a very definite start, and Antoine was certain he saw him blush.

"Why …?" he asked in an uneasy voice.

"Oh, I hadn't any special reason for asking." But Antoine's curiosity was aroused. "I was only thinking one could make a rather pretty sketch here, with the barges, the lock, and the little bridge."

The towpath broadened, became a road. They were coming to a wide reach of the Oise, whose swollen waters rolled towards them.

"There's Compiègne," Antoine said.

He had stopped and put his hand to his forehead to shelter his eyes from the sun. On the horizon, above the green mass of the woods, he saw a group of pinnacles around a belfry, the round tower of a church. He was about to tell the names of the churches to his brother —who, like himself, was holding his hand over his eyes and seemed to be gazing towards the horizon—when he noticed that Jacques's eyes were fixed on the ground beside his feet. He seemed to be waiting for Antoine to go on with the walk; without a word, Antoine started forward again.

All Compiègne was out of doors. The brothers joined the crowd streaming across the bridge. There had evidently been a medical examination of recruits that morning, for groups of young men in their Sunday best were buying tricolour ribbons from street venders and lurching down the pavements arm in arm, leaving no room for the ordinary townsfolk, and bawling soldiers' songs. On the Mall, amongst young women in summery attire and booted cavalrymen the local families were strolling, greeting each other affably.

The sight of all these people was making Jacques feel more and more ill at ease and he begged Antoine to come away.

They took a street that turned off from the main thoroughfare; shaded and quiet, it gently rose towards the Palace Square. When they came out into the open again, the sunlight almost blinded them. Jacques blinked his eyes. Halting, they sat down under the trees, neatly set out in alternating rows, shadeless as yet.

"Listen!" he said, putting his hand on Antoine's knee. The bells of Saint-Jacques's were ringing for vespers, and their long vibrations seemed to merge into the sunlight.

Antoine supposed that at last, unwittingly, the boy had responded to the bright enchantment of that first spring Sunday.

"A penny for your thoughts!" He smiled.

But, instead of answering, Jacques rose and began walking towards the park. The majesty of the scene did not seem to evoke the slightest response from him. What he wanted most of all apparently was to get away from places where there were people about. The calm that reigned around the château, on the great walled terraces, drew him towards it. Antoine followed, making conversation about whatever caught his eye: the clipped box borders skirting the green lawns, the ringdoves settling on the statues' shoulders. But the boy's replies were always evasive.

Suddenly Jacques asked: "Have you spoken to him?"

"To whom?"

"Fontanin."

"Yes, I met him the other day in the Latin Quarter. Do you know, he's a day-boy now at the lycée Louis-le-Grand?"

"Really?" was all Jacques said at first. Then he added, with a faint tremor in his voice that for the first time had something in it of the peremptory tone familiar with him in the past: "You didn't tell him where I was, did you?"

"He didn't ask me. Why? You'd rather he didn't know?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because …!" He did not go on.

"An excellent reason!" Antoine laughed. "But I suppose you've got another, eh?"

Jacques stared blankly at him; evidently he had not realized Antoine was joking. Aloof as ever, he started walking again. Then abruptly he asked another question.

"And Gise? Does she know?"

"Where you are? No, I don't think so. But with children one can never be sure of anything." Now that Jacques himself had started a topic of conversation, Antoine made the most of it. "And Gise is such a quaint litde thing. Some days you'd think she was quite grown up; she listens to everything that's said with her eyes full of interest —and pretty eyes they are! And on other days she's just like a baby. Would you believe it, yesterday Mademoiselle was looking for her everywhere, and there she was playing with her dolls under the hall table! And she's going on eleven, you know."

They were going down towards the wistaria arbour; Jacques halted at the bottom of the steps beside a sphinx in mottled pink marble, and began stroking pensively the sleek, cool forehead gleaming in the sunlight. Was he thinking of Gise and Mademoiselle? Had a sudden picture risen before him of the old hall table, with its fringed cloth and silver platter full of visiting-cards? So Antoine thought, and went on cheerfully.

"Heaven only knows where she gets all her ideas from. Our home can't be much fun for a kid, can it? Mademoiselle adores her, but you know what she's like; she's always in a flutter, she won't let the poor child do anything, never leaves her in peace for a moment."

Laughing, he tried to catch his brother's eye, feeling that these little details of their family life were like a secret treasury to which they alone had the key—something unique and irreplaceable, the memories of childhood spent in common. But Jacques vouchsafed only a fleeting, artificial smile.

Antoine, however, was not to be silenced now.

"Meals aren't much fun nowadays, I can tell you. Father doesn't open his mouth, or else serves up to Mademoiselle a sort of rehash of his latest public speeches, or tells her how he spent the day, down to the least detail. By the way, his election for the Institute is going very well, I hear."

"Yes?" A hint of tenderness crept over Jacques's face. After musing for a moment, he smiled. "So much the better!"

"All his friends are putting their backs into it," Antoine went on. "The Abbé's a pillar of strength; he has friends in every camp, you know. The election is in three weeks." He had stopped laughing, and added in a lower voice: "You may say what you like, but to be a member of the Institute means something. And Father really deserves it, don't you agree?"

"Rather!" the boy cried enthusiastically. "He's awfully good, really —a really good man at heart." He stopped; then, obviously eager to continue, could not bring himself to do so. He was blushing.

"I'm waiting till Father's comfortably ensconced beneath that august dome before springing a great surprise on him." Antoine was obviously carried away by his subject. "I'm really awfully cramped in my room at the end of the hall; I've no room for my books, for one thing. Did you know Gise has been put in your old room? I'd like to persuade Father to rent the little flat on the ground floor, where that old chap we called 'the gay old spark' is now; he's leaving on the fifteenth. There are three rooms and I could have a proper study where I could see patients, and perhaps a sort of laboratory—I could fix it up in the kitchen."

Suddenly he realized how tactless he was being in thus depicting the freedom he enjoyed and his preoccupations with his personal comfort, to this unhappy boy cut off from the world. And he realized, too, that he had just spoken of Jacques's room as if he were never to come back to it. He stopped abruptly. Jacques had resumed his air of indifference.

"Well, now," Antoine said, to clear the air, "how about something to eat? What do you say to it? I expect you're feeling peckish."

He had lost all hope of establishing easy fraternal relations between Jacques and himself.

They went back to the town. The streets were still crowded, and buzzing like a beehive. The tea-shops were overflowing with customers. Brought to a full stop by the crowd, Jacques stood unmoving in front of a confectioner's window resplendent with gaudy rows of cakes in sugar icing and exuding cream, the sight of which seemed to fascinate him.

"Right! Let's go in here," Antoine smiled.

Jacques's hands were trembling as he took the plate Antoine handed him. They sat down at the far end of the shop, in front of a pyramid of mixed cakes. Rich wafts of vanilla and warm pastry came up through a service hatch. Unspeaking, slumped in his chair, his eyes swollen as if with unshed tears, Jacques wolfed his food down, stopping after each cake and waiting for Antoine to hand him another, which he began at once to eat voraciously. Antoine ordered two ports. Jacques's fingers were still trembling as he took up his glass. The first sip of the wine seemed to burn him, and he coughed. Antoine drank his wine slowly, feigning not to notice his brother. Taking courage, Jacques gulped down a mouthful, felt it tingling in his gullet like liquid fire; after another gulp he drained his glass to the dregs. When Antoine began to pour him out a second glass, he pretended not to notice and, only when the glass was nearly full, made a vague gesture of refusal… .

When they left the shop the sun was nearing the horizon and the temperature had dropped. But Jacques was unconscious of the change. His cheeks were burning and his whole body tingled with a feeling of well-being so unaccustomed that it was almost painful.

"We've got those two miles to cover," Antoine said. "I suppose we'd better start back at once."

Jacques was on the verge of tears. Clenching his fists in his pocket, he set his jaw and bent his head. Antoine, who was secretly watching him, was alarmed by the change that had come over the boy's face.

"Sure the walk hasn't tired you?" he asked.

It seemed to Jacques that there was a new note of affection in his brother's-voice. But he could not find a word to say, and the face he turned towards Antoine was grief-stricken, the eyes were full of tears.

Greatly amazed, Antoine followed him in silence. After they had crossed the bridge and left the town behind, and were once more on the towpath, he moved closer to Jacques, and took his arm.

"Not too sorry to have missed your usual walk?" he asked with a smile.

Jacques made no reply. Then suddenly it all came over him with a rush—the after-effect of this first heady taste of freedom, of the strong wine, and now the soft, sad dusk falling from the bright air. His emotions were too strong for him; he burst out sobbing. Antoine put his arm around him, steadying him, then sat down on the embankment and drew his brother to his side. He was no longer bent on prying into the intimacies of his young brother's life. He was conscious only of a vast relief that at last the blank wall of apathy against which he had been coming all day long seemed to be giving way.

They were alone on the deserted river bank, alone with the dark recession of the water, under a misty sky dappled with the fires of sunset. In front of them a punt, chained to the bank, was swaying on the eddies, making the dry reeds rustle.

They had still a good way to go, Antoine was thinking, and they could not stay here for ever. Above all, he wanted to make the boy raise his head.

"What's come over you, Jacques? Why are you crying?"

Jacques pressed tighter against him.

"Was it thinking about your usual walk that made you cry?"

Jacques felt he must say something. "Yes," he answered.

"Why should it? Where do you usually go on Sundays?"

No answer.

"So you don't like going out with Arthur?"

"No."

"Why don't you say so? If you'd rather have old Léon, it's easy to fix up, you know."

"No! No!" The change in his voice from apathy to rage was startling. Jacques had straightened up, and Antoine was dumbfounded by the look of bitter hatred on his face.

It seemed as if Jacques could not bear staying still; he began hurrying along the path, dragging his brother after him.

"So you didn't like going out with Léon, either?"

Jacques went on walking, his eyes wide open, gritting his teeth, and obstinately silent.

"Still, he behaved quite nicely to you, didn't he?" Antoine went on.

Again no answer. He was afraid Jacques was going to shrink back into his shell once more, and tried to take his arm. The boy shook it off, and-hurried on. Antoine followed, uncertain how to continue, anxiously wondering how to-regain his confidence. Then, unexpectedly, Jacques slowed down, with a sudden sob. Tears were running down his cheeks; he did' not look at his brother.

"Antoine, please promise not to tell, never to tell any one. I didn't go walking with Léon, scarcely at all… ."

He stopped. Antoine was on the brink of asking a question, but instinct warned him not to utter a sound. And presently Jacques spoke again in a voice that sounded uncertain, a little hoarse.

"On the first days, yes. As a matter of fact it was on our walks that he began to—to tell me things. And he lent me books; I didn't believe such books existed! Afterwards he said he'd post letters for me, if I wanted. It was then I wrote to Daniel. But I hadn't any money for stamps. Then something happened. Léon had noticed I could draw a bit. Then—but you can guess, can't you? It was he who told me what was wanted. Then, in exchange, he paid for the stamp on my letter. In the evening he showed .the drawings round to the guards, and they kept on asking for others, more and more elaborate ones. From that moment Léon did just as he liked, he stopped our walks altogether. Instead of going into the country, he used to take me round the back of the buildings, through the village. The children used to run after us. We always went by a side-street to get into the tavern through the back yard. Then he'd go off to drink and play cards or whatever he wanted to do, and while he was at it I was kept hidden in a wash-house, with an old blanket over me."

"What? They kept you in hiding?"

"Yes, I used to 'have to stay two hours locked up in the wash-house like that."

"But why?"

"I don't know. Well, of course the people who kept the place felt anxious… . One day there was some washing to be dried in there, so I was kept in a passage instead. The woman there said—she said …" His voice was broken by sobs.

"What did she say?"

"She said: 'One never knows with these beastly little …' " He was sobbing so violently that he could not go on.

" 'These beastly little …'?" Antoine prompted.

" '. . little jailbirds'!' " He brought out the word with an effort, then burst into a storm of weeping.

Antoine waited; just then his keen curiosity ^blunted the edge of his compassion.

"And what else?" he asked. "Tell me what else they did to you."

"Antoine, Antoine-!" he cried. "Swear to me you won't tell anyone. Swear! If ever-Papa suspected anything, he'd … Papa, is so good, you know; it would upset him terribly. It's not his fault if he doesn't see things as we do." His voice-grew appealing. "Antoine, please, Antoine—don't leave me now! Please!"

"Of course not, Jacques; I'm here and I'll .stand by you. I won't breathe a word, I'll do exactly what you want. Only—tell me the truth." Seeing Jacques could not bring himself to speak, he added: "Did he beat you?"

"Who?"

"Why, Léon."

"Of course not!" Jacques was so surprised that he could not help smiling through his tears.

"They don't beat you there?"

"Never."

"Really and truly, never?"

"Never, Antoine."

"Well—what else?"

Jacques was silent.

"This new man, Arthur? He's not a nice chap, eh?"

Jacques shook his head.

"What's wrong with him? Does he go to the tavern, too?"

"No."

"Ah! So you do go out for real walks with him?"

"Yes."

"Well, what have you got against him? Is he harsh with you?"

"No."

"Then what is it? You don't like him?"

"No."

"Why? There must be some reason… ."

"Because …" Jacques turned his eyes away.

Antoine was silent for a moment, then he broke out: "But, damn it all, why don't you complain? Why don't you tell the superintendent about it?"

Carried away by nervous excitement, Jacques pressed his body feverishly against his brother's.

"Oh, Antoine," he begged, "you mustn't! You swore you wouldn't tell anyone about it. You know you did."

"Yes, yes, that's understood. But what I'm asking is, why didn't you complain of Léon to M. Faîsme?"

Jacques merely shook his head, without a word.

"Do you suspect that the superintendent knows what's going on, and connives at it?" he suggested.

"Oh, no!"

"What do you think of the superintendent?"

"Nothing."

"Do you think he gives the other boys a bad time?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, he looks decent enough, but now I feel all at sea. Old Léon, too, looked a good chap. Have you heard anything against the superintendent?"

"No."

"Are the staff afraid of him? Old Léon and Arthur, for instance?"

"Yes, a bit."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Because he's the superintendent."

"How about you? When he's with you have you noticed anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"So you don't dare to speak freely to him?"

"No."

"Supposing you'd told him that Léon went to the tavern instead of taking you for walks, and that you were kept locked up in a wash-house, what do you think he'd have done?"

"He'd have had Léon sent away." Jacques sounded terrified at the thought.

"So something prevented you from telling him. What was it?"

"That, of course!"

Antoine could make nothing of the answer, but he had a feeling that his brother was trapped in a network of complicities. Nevertheless, at all costs, he was determined to get at the truth.

"Look here! Is it that you don't want to tell me what it really was? Or don't you know, yourself?"

"There were some drawings that—that they forced me to sign." Jacques lowered his eyes. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added: "But it's not only that. One can't say anything to M. Faîsme, you understand, because—well, because he is the superintendent. You see what I mean, don't you?"

His tone was weary, but sincere, and Antoine did not insist; he mistrusted himself, knowing how apt he was to jump to over-hasty conclusions.

"Anyhow," he said, "are you working well?"

The sluice-gates were in sight; behind the little windows in the barges lamps were already being lit. Jacques walked ahead, his eyes fixed on the ground.

Antoine repeated his question.

"So you're not going ahead with your work, either?"

Jacques shook his head, without looking up.

"But the superintendent told me your tutor was pleased with you."

Jacques seemed to have difficulty in keeping up with his brother's cross-examination.

"Well, you see," he said at last, in a toneless voice, "the tutor is quite old and he doesn't care much whether I work or not. He comes because he's been told to come, that's all. He knows nobody will check what he does. And he prefers having nothing to take home with him to correct. He stays for an hour, and we just chat; he's very friendly with me, he tells me about Compiègne and his other pupils and all sorts of things. He's not very happy, either. He's told me about his daughter who has stomach trouble and quarrels with his wife, because he's married again; and about his son who was a company sergeant-major, but was cashiered because he ran into debt over a woman. We just pretend to be reading, doing lessons, but we don't do anything, really."

He stopped. Antoine found nothing to say. He felt almost intimidated by this youngster who already had such wide experience of life. Besides, he had nothing more to ask. The boy resumed speaking, of his own accord, in a low, monotonous voice; but, in the disconnected flow of phrases, it was impossible to make out the associations between his ideas, or even what, after his previous taciturnity, was impelling him to pour his heart out.

"It's like what I do about the wine and water at the meals—I leave it to them, you see. Léon asked me to at the start, and it's all the same to me, you know; I'd just as soon drink plain water from the jug. What really annoys me is that they're always prowling about in the corridor; with their soft slippers one can't hear them. Sometimes, almost, they frighten me. No, I'm not really frightened; only the dreadful thing is that I can't make a movement without their seeing and hearing me. One's always alone, but never really alone, you understand. Not on my walks, not anywhere at all. It's nothing so very terrible, but in the long run, you know—oh, you've no idea of the effect it has, it makes one feel as if—as if everything was going round. There are days when I'd like to hide under my bed and cry. Not just to cry, you know, but to cry *without being seen*. It's like when you came this morning. They told me in the chapel. The superintendent sent the chief clerk to see what I was wearing and they brought my overcoat and my hat, as I was bare-headed. Oh, don't think they did it to deceive you, Antoine. No, not at all; it's just the custom here. It's like that on Mondays, the first Monday in the month, when Papa comes for the committee meeting, they always do things like that; just little trifles to make Papa pleased. It's the same thing with the bed-linen; what you saw this morning is clean linen that's always kept in my cupboard, to put out in the room if anyone comes. It's not that they leave me with dirty linen; no, they change it quite often enough and, when I ask for an extra towel, they always give it. But it's the custom, you know, to make things look nice when a visitor comes… .

"It's wrong of me to tell you all this, Antoine; it'll make you fancy all sorts of things that aren't true. I assure you I've nothing really to complain of, that the discipline isn't at all irksome, they don't try to make things hard for me; not a bit of it. But it's just this—this softness, do you seep And then, having nothing to do all day, tied up like that with nothing, absolutely nothing to do. At first the hours seemed to me so, so long, you've no idea. But one day I broke the mainspring of my watch, and since then it's been better, little by little I've got used to it. But I don't know how to express it, it's as if one had gone asleep deep down in oneself. One doesn't really suffer, because it's like being asleep, but it's disagreeable all the same, you understand."

He was silent for a moment. When he spoke again it was in broken phrases and the words seemed to come with an immense effort.

"And then, Antoine … no, I can't tell you everything. But you must know… . Left alone like that, one gets to have a whole lot of ideas … ideas one shouldn't have. Especially as … Well, there are Léon's stories, you know. And the drawings. Well, in a way it helps to pass the time, you know. I make them in the daytime and at night somehow my mind comes back to them. I know it's not right, I oughtn't to. Only … When one's alone … you understand, don't you? Oh, I'm wrong to tell you all this, I feel I shall regret it. But I'm so tired this evening, I can't hold myself in."

Suddenly he gave way to a flood of tears.

He had a strange feeling of frustration, as if, for all his efforts, he could not help lying, and the more he tried to tell the truth, the worse he succeeded in doing so. Yet nothing of what he had said was actually untrue. But by his tone, by overcolouring his troubles, and by the choice of facts he had described, he was conscious of having given a false impression of his life—and yet he could not do otherwise.

They had been making slow progress and were only half-way back. And it was half-past five. There was plenty of daylight left, but a mist was rising from the river, brimming over into the fields and swathing them in drifting vapour.

Antoine, as he helped the stumbling youngster on his way, was thinking hard. Not of what he must do; on that score his mind was made up: he must get the boy out of it. But he was wondering how to get his consent, and that looked like being difficult. At his first words Jacques clung to his arm, sobbing, reminding him of his promise to say nothing, do nothing.

"But of course, old man; I've sworn it! I'll do nothing you don't want me to do. Only, listen. Do you want to go on like this, frittering your life away in idleness, with no one of your own kind to talk to, in these sordid surroundings? And to think that only this morning I imagined you were happy here!"

"But I *am* happy!" In a moment all he had complained of fled from his mind, and all he now was conscious of was the languid ease of his seclusion, the somnolent routine and absence of control, not to mention his isolation from the family.

"Happy? If you were, I'd be ashamed of you! No, Jacques, I can't believe you really enjoy rotting away in that place. You're degrading yourself, ruining your brains—and it's been going on for far too long. I've promised you not to act without your consent; I'll keep my word, don't worry. But do think seriously about it; let's look the facts squarely in the face, like two friends, you and I—for we're friends now, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"You trust me, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then? What are you afraid of?"

"I don't want to go back to Paris."

"Look here, Jacques, after the picture you've given me of your life here, family life couldn't be worse."

"Yes, it could!"

The bitterness in his voice stunned Antoine into silence, and he began to feel less sure of himself. "Damn it!" he muttered, vainly racking his brain for a solution. Time pressed, and he felt as if he were walking in pitch darkness. Then suddenly he saw light, he had hit on the solution! In a flash the whole plan was outlined in his head. He laughed.

"Jacques!" he cried. "Now listen to me and don't interrupt. Or, rather, answer. Suppose we found ourselves, you and I, alone in the world, wouldn't you like to come and live with me?"

At first the boy failed to understand what Antoine meant.

"But, Antoine," he said at last, "what ever do you mean? There's Papa… ."

Menacing, between them and the future, loomed their father's figure. The same idea crossed the minds of both: how easy things would be if he …! Catching its reflection in his brother's gaze, Antoine felt suddenly ashamed and averted his eyes.

"Of course," Jacques was saying, "if I'd lived with you and only you, I'd have turned out quite different. I'd have worked well … I would work well; I might become, perhaps, a great poet."

Antoine stopped him with a gesture. "Well, then, listen; if I gave you my word that no one except myself should have anything to do with you, would you agree to leave this place?"

"Ye-es," Jacques murmured doubtfully. It was his craving for affection and his reluctance to offend his brother that led him to agree.

"But would you promise to let me plan out your life and studies, and keep an eye on you generally, just as if you were my son?"

"Yes."

"Right!" For a while Antoine kept silent, thinking things out. His desires were always so imperative that he never questioned their feasibility, and indeed he had never failed so far in bringing off what he had set his heart on, definitely and doggedly. He turned to the youngster, smiling.

"It's not a daydream, Jacques." His tone was emphatic, though the smile did not leave his lips. "I know what I'm embarking on. Within a fortnight—do you hear?—within a fortnight it shall happen; take my word for it. Now, you've got to go back to your precious institution, looking as innocent as a lamb. Got it? And within two weeks, I swear it, you shall be free."

Though he had hardly heard what his brother was saying, Jacques pressed against Antoine, seized by a sudden longing for affection; he would have liked to take him in his arms and hug him and to stay thus, unmoving, pressed to the comforting warmth of his big brother's chest.

"You can depend on me," Antoine repeated.

He, too, was feeling comforted and uplifted in his own esteem, rejoicing in a welcome sense of power. He compared his life with Jacques's. "Poor devil," he thought, "things are always happening to him that would never happen to anyone else!" He meant: "the sort of things that have never happened to me." He pitied Jacques, but above all he felt a very keen joy at being the man he was, so levelheaded and so well equipped for happiness, for becoming a personality, a great doctor. He felt inclined to quicken his step, to whistle a gay tune. But Jacques seemed tired, and could make only slow progress. Anyhow, they were coming into Crouy.

"Trust me," he murmured once again, tightening his pressure on Jacques's arm.

M. Faîsme was smoking a cigar in front of the entrance-gate. No sooner did he catch sight of them than he came tripping along the road towards them.

"Hallo, my friends! Had a good time, eh? I don't mind betting you've been to have a look at Compiègne." Laughing out of sheer high

spirits, he waved his arms in the direction of the town. "You went along the towpath, didn't you? Such a nice walk that is! Really, the country round here is charming, too charming for words!" He took out his watch. "I don't want to hurry you, doctor, but if you don't want to miss your train again …"

"I'm off," Antoine said. There was emotion in his voice as he said quietly: "*Au revoir*, Jacques!"

Night was falling. Jacques had his back to the fading light, and Antoine dimly saw a young, submissive face and eyes gazing towards the dark horizon. Again he said:

"*Au revoir*!"

Arthur was waiting in the quadrangle. Jacques would have preferred to take leave of the superintendent politely, but M. Faîsme had turned his back on him. He was bolting the entrance-gate, as he did every evening. The dog was barking loudly and across the noise Jacques made out Arthur's voice.

"Now then! Are you coming?"

He followed Arthur obediently.

He came back to his cell with a feeling of relief. Antoine's chair was still there by the table, and his elder brother's affection seemed still lingering round it. He put on his old suit. His body was tired, but his brain active. There seemed to be within him, beside the everyday Jacques, a second self, an immaterial being, new-born today, who watched the first self going about its tasks, and dominated it.

Somehow he found it impossible to sit still and he began pacing round and round the room. He was in the grip of a new and powerful emotion, which kept him on his feet, a vital force that thrust itself upon his consciousness. He went to the door and stood there, his forehead resting on the glass pane, his eyes fixed on the lamp in the deserted corridor. The stifling atmosphere from the hot pipes increased his fatigue. He was half asleep now. Suddenly on the far side of the glass a shadow loomed up. The double-locked door opened; Arthur was bringing his dinner.

"Come along, get a move on, you little Schwein!"

Before starting on the lentils, Jacques removed from the tray the slice of gruyere and the mug of wine and water.

"For me?" the young man asked. Smiling, he took the piece of cheese and moved across to the wardrobe before starting to eat it, so as not to be visible from the door. It was the time when, before beginning his dinner, M. Faîsme made a round of inspection along the corridors. He always wore slippers and oftener than not his visits became known only after his departure, by the reek of cigar-smoke wafted through the grating.

Jacques ate what remained of his bread, dipping the pieces into the lentil juice. No sooner had he finished than Arthur called to him.

"Now, young man, turn in!"

"But it's not eight yet."

"Don't you know it's Sunday and the boys are waiting for me downtown? Get a move on!"

Without answering, Jacques began to undress. Arthur, his hands in his pockets, watched him. There was a touch of unexpected, almost feminine grace in the coarse face and stalwart, stocky figure of the fair-haired young man.

"That brother of yours," he said with a knowing air, "he's a bit of all right; a real gent he is!" Smiling, he made as if to slip a coin into his pocket, then took the empty tray and went out.

When he returned Jacques was in bed.

"Mighty quick you've been tonight." The young man kicked Jacques's shoes under the washstand. "Look here, can't you tidy up your things a bit before turning in?" He came up to the bed. "Hear what I say, you little *Schwein*?" He pressed his hands on Jacques's shoulders and gave a little laugh. The smile on the boy's face grew more and more strained. "Quite sure you aren't hiding anything between the sheets? No books? No candles?"

He slipped his hand between the sheets. But with a movement that Arthur could neither foresee nor forestall, the boy broke free and flung himself away, his back to the wall. His eyes were dark with hatred.

"Aha!" Arthur chuckled. "We're very high and mighty tonight, ain't we? … But I could tell some tales, too—and don't you forget it!" He spoke in a low tone, keeping an eye on the door. Then, without paying any more attention to Jacques, he lit the oil-lamp that remained on all night, shut off the electric circuit with his master-key, and went out, whistling.

Jacques heard the key turn twice in the lock and then a sound of receding steps, rope-soled shoes padding away along the corridor. Then he rolled into the middle of the bed, stretched his limbs, and lay on his back. His teeth were chattering. He had lost heart, and when he recalled the events of the day and his confessions, he had an access of fury quickly followed by a mood of utter misery. Glimpses rose before him of Paris, of Antoine and his home, of quarrels and work and parental discipline. Yes, he had made an irremediable blunder, he had made himself over to his enemies! "But what do they want of me? Why can't they leave me alone?" He began to cry. Despairingly he tried to console himself with the thought that Antoine's fantastic idea would come to nothing, that M. Thibault would put his foot down. And now he saw his father as a deliverer. Yes, of course nothing would come of it, they would end by leaving him in peace, by letting him stay here, in this haven of repose, of lethargy and loneliness.

Above his head, on the ceiling, the light from the night-lamp flickered, flickered… .

Yes, here was peace, peace and happiness.

# IV

ON THE ill-lit staircase Antoine met his father's secretary, M. Chasle, coming down, slinking rat-like close along the wall. Seeing Antoine, he pulled up abruptly with a startled look.

"Ah, so it's you?" He had picked up from his employer the trick of opening a conversation with this remark. Then he announced in a confidential whisper: "There's bad news! The university group are backing the Dean of the Faculty of Letters for the vacant seat at the Institute; that's fifteen votes lost at least; with those of the law members that makes twenty-five votes gone. Bad luck, isn't it? Your father will tell you all about it." He coughed. M. Chasle was always coughing, out of nervousness, but, believing himself to be a victim of chronic catarrh, sucked cough-lozenges all day. "I must fly now, or Mother will be getting anxious," he went on, seeing that Antoine made no comment. He took out his watch, listened to it before looking at the time, turned up his collar, and went on down the stairs.

For seven years the little bespectacled man had been coming daily to work for M. Thibault, yet Antoine hardly knew him better now than on the first day. He spoke little, and always in. a low voice, and his conversation was a tissue of commonplaces, a thesaurus of catchwords. He was a creature of trivial habits and a model of punctuality, and he seemed to have a touching devotion for his mother, with whom he lived. His shoes always squeaked. His Christian name was Jules, but M. Thibault, mindful of his 'own dignity, always addressed his secretary as "M. Chasle." Antoine and Jacques had two nicknames for him: "Old Gumdrop" and the "Pest."

Antoine went straight to his father's study. He found him setting his papers in order before going to bed.

"Ah, so it's you? Bad news!"

"I know," Antoine said. "M. Chasle told me about it."

With an irritated jerk of his head M. Thibault freed his chin from his collar; it always vexed him to find that what he was proposing to announce was known already. But just now Antoine was not inclined to pay attention to his father's mood; his mind was full of the object of this interview, and he was unpleasantly conscious that a sort of paralysis was creeping over him. He decided for a frontal attack, before it was too late.

"I, too, have some bad news for you, I'm sorry to say. Jacques cannot stay at Crouy." He took a deep breath, then went on at once: "I've just come back from there. I've seen him. I got him to talk frankly, and I've learned some abominable things. I want to talk to you about it. It's up to you to get him out of the place as soon as possible."

For some seconds M. Thibault did not move; his stupefaction was perceptible only in his voice.

"What's that? You've been to Crouy? When? Why did you go there? You must be off your head. I insist on your explaining this conduct."

Relieved though he was to have taken the obstacle in his first stride, Antoine was extremely ill at ease and incapable of speaking. There followed an oppressive silence. M. Thibault had opened his eyes; now they closed again slowly, reluctantly, it seemed. Then he sat down and set his fists on the desk.

"Explain yourself, my dear boy," he said. He spoke each syllable with careful emphasis. "You say you have been to Crouy. When did you go?"

"Today."

"With whom?"

"Alone."

"Did they—let you in?"

"Naturally."

"Did they let you see your brother?"

"I have spent the day with him. Alone with him."

Antoine had a belligerent way of rapping out the last word of every phrase he spoke; it made M. Thibault angrier than ever, but also warned him to go warily with his son.

"You are a child no longer." The way he said this gave the impression he had just inferred Antoine's age from the sound of his voice. "You must understand the unsuitability of acting thus, behind my back. Had you any particular reason for going to Crouy without telling me? Did your brother write to you to come?"

"No. I had suddenly become anxious about him, that's all."

"Anxious? In what way?"

"About everything, about the whole system, about the effects of the life Jacques has been subjected to for nine months."

"Really, my dear fellow, you—you surprise me." He hesitated. The measured terms he was deliberately employing were belied by the large, tightly clenched hands and the furious way he jerked his head forward at each pause. "This mistrust of your father is …"

"Anybody can make mistakes," Antoine broke in. "And I can prove what I say."

"Prove it?"

"Listen, Father, it's no use losing your temper. I suppose we both desire the same thing—Jacques's welfare. When you know the state of moral decay I found him in, I'm sure you will be the first to decide that he must leave the reformatory at the earliest possible moment."

"That I will not!"

Antoine tried not to hear the sneering laugh which accompanied the remark.

"You will, Father."

"I tell you I will not!"

"Father, when you've heard …"

"Do you, by any chance, take me for a fool? Do you suppose I've had to wait for you to go and look round Crouy to learn how things are done there? I'd have you know that for over ten years I've been making a thorough inspection of the place every month and followed it up by a written report. No new step is taken there without being first discussed by the committee whose president I am. Now are you satisfied?"

"Father, what I saw there …"

"That's enough. Your brother may have poisoned your mind with all the lies he pleases; you're easy game. But you'll find I'm not so easy to hoodwink."

"Jacques didn't breathe a word of complaint."

M. Thibault seemed thunderstruck.

"Then, why on earth …?" he asked, raising his voice a little.

"Quite the contrary," Antoine continued, "and that's the alarming thing. He told me he didn't worry; in fact he said he was happy, that he likes being there." Provoked by his father's chuckle of self-satisfaction, Antoine added in a cutting tone: "The poor boy has such memories of family life that even prison life strikes him as more agreeable."

The insult missed its mark.

"Very well," M. Thibault retorted, "then everything's as it should be; we're at one on that. What more do you want?"

As he was feeling less sure now of Jacque's release, Antoine judged it wiser not to repeat to M. Thibault all the boy had told him. He resolved to keep to generalities and withhold his detailed complaints.

"I'm going to tell you the whole truth," he began, gazing intently at his father. "I admit that I'd suspected ill-treatment, privation, solitary confinement, and so forth. Now I know. Happily there is nothing of that sort at Crouy. Jacques is not suffering physically, I grant, but in his mind, his morals—and that's far worse. You're being deceived when they tell you that isolation is doing him good. The remedy is far more dangerous than the disease. His days are passed in the most degrading sloth. As for his tutor, the less said the better; the truth is that Jacques does no work, and it's already obvious that his brain is growing incapable of the least effort. To prolong the treatment, believe me, will be to compromise his future irreparably. He is sinking into such a state of indifference to everything, and his mental flabbiness is such, that in another month or two he'll be too far gone, it will be too late to bring him back to mental health."

Antoine's eyes had never left his father's face as he was speaking. He seemed to be concentrating the utmost impact of his gaze on the stolid face, trying to force from it some gleam of acquiescence. M. Thibault, withdrawn into himself, preserved a massive immobility; he brought to mind one of those pachyderms whose strength remains hidden so long as they are at-rest, and he had the elephant's large, flat ears and, now and then, his cunning eye. Antoine's harangue had reassured him. There had been some incipient scandals at the reformatory, certain attendants had had to be dismissed without the reasons for their departure being bruited abroad, and M. Thibault had for a moment feared that Antoine's revelations were of this order. Now he breathed freely again.

"Do you think that's news to me, my dear boy?" he asked with an air of jocular good humour. "All you've been saying does credit to your kindness of heart; but permit me to say that these questions of reformatory treatment are extremely complex, and in this field one does not become an expert overnight. Trust my experience, and the opinions of those who are versed in these subjects. You talk of your brother's—what do you call it?—'mental flabbiness.' But that's all to the good. You know what Jacques was like. Don't you realize that is the only way to crush out such evil propensities as his—by breaking down his will? For by gradually weakening the will-power of a depraved boy, you sap his evil instincts and, in the end, eradicate them. Now, consider the facts. Isn't your brother completely changed? His fits of rage have ceased; he's disciplined, polite to all who come in contact with him. You yourself admit that he has come to like the order and routine of his new life. Well, really, shouldn't we be proud of getting such good results within less than a year?"

He was teasing out the tip of his beard between his puffy fingers as he spoke; when he had finished, he-cast a side-glance at his son. That booming voice and majestic delivery lent an appearance of force to his least words, and Antoine was so accustomed to letting himself be impressed by his father that in his heart he weakened. But now his pride led M. Thibault to commit a blunder.

"Now that I come to think of it," he said, "I wonder why I'm taking so much trouble to defend the propriety of a step which is not being, and will not be, reconsidered. I'm doing what I consider I ought to do, after taking careful thought, and I do not have to render an account to anyone. Get that into your head, my boy!"

Antoine made a gesture of indignation.

"That's not the way to silence me, Father! I tell you once more, Jacques must not remain at Crouy."

M. Thibault again emitted a harsh, sarcastic laugh. Antoine made an effort to keep his self-control.

"No, Father, it would be a crime to leave Jacques there. There are sterling qualities in him which must not be allowed to run to seed. And, let me tell you, Father, you've often been mistaken about his character; he irritates you and you don't see his …"

"What don't I see? It's only since he's gone that we've had any peace at home. Isn't that true? Very well, when he's reformed, we shall see about having him back. Not before!" His fist rose as if he were about to bring it down upon the table with a crash, but he merely opened his hand and laid his palm flat on the desk. His wrath was still smouldering. Antoine made no effort to restrain his own.

"I tell you, Father," he shouted, "Jacques shall not stay at Crouy! I'll see to that!"

"Really now!" M. Thibault sounded frankly amused. "Really! Aren't you, perhaps, a little inclined to forget that you're not the master here?"

"No, I'm not forgetting it. That's why I ask you—what you intend to do."

"To do?" M. Thibault repeated the words slowly, with a frosty smile. For a moment his eyebrows lifted. "There's no doubt about what I mean to do: to give M. Faîsme a good dressing-down for admitting you without my authorization, and to forbid you ever again to set foot in Crouy."

Antoine folded his arms.

"So that's all they mean," he said, "your pamphlets, your speeches, all your noble sentiments. They come in handy for public meetings, but when a boy's mind is being wrecked, your own son's mind, it's all the same to you. All you want is a quiet life at home, with no worries— and to hell with all the rest!"

"You young ruffian!" M. Thibault shouted, rising to his feet. "Yes. I'd seen it coming. I've known for quite a while what to expect of you. Yes, I've noticed them—the remarks you sometimes let fall at table and the books you read, your favourite newspapers. I've seen your slackness in performing your religious duties. One thing leads to another; when religious principles go, moral anarchy sets in and, finally, rebellion against all proper authority."

Antoine made a contemptuous gesture.

"Don't let's confuse the issues. We're talking about the boy, and it's urgent. Father, promise me that Jacques …"

"I forbid you to speak to me again about him. Not another word. Now have I made myself clear enough?"

Their eyes met, challenging.

"So that's your last word, is it?"

"Get out!"

"Ah, Father, you don't know me!" There was defiance in Antoine's laugh. "I swear to you I'll get Jacques out of that damned jail! And that I'll stop at nothing!"

A bulky, menacing form, M. Thibault advanced towards his son, his under-jaw protruding.

"Get out!"

Antoine had opened the door. Turning on the threshold, he faced his father and said in a low, resolute tone:

"At nothing, do you hear? Even if I have to start a campaign, a new one, in my 'favourite newspapers'!"

# V

EARLY next morning, after a sleepless night, Antoine was waiting in a vestry of the Archbishop's Palace for the Abbé Vécard to finish his mass. It was essential that the priest should know the whole story, and somehow intervene; that was now Jacques's only chance.

The interview lasted for a long time. The Abbé had had the young man sit beside him, as if for a confession, and listened meditatively to him, in his favourite position, leaning well back in his chair, with his head slightly drooping to the left. He let Antoine have his say without interrupting him. The long-nosed, sallow face was almost expressionless, but now and again he cast a gentle, searching look on his companion, a look that conveyed his wish to read the thoughts behind the spoken words. Though he had seen less of Antoine than of the other members of the Thibault family, he had always treated him with particular esteem; what just now gave a certain piquancy to this attitude was that it was largely due to M. Thibault himself, whose vanity was always agreeably tickled by Antoine's successes, and who was fond of singing his son's praises.

Antoine did not try to win over the Abbé by dint of argument, but gave him an unvarnished account of the day he had spent at Crouy, ending by the scene with his father. For that the Abbé reproved him, not by words but by a deprecating flutter of his hands, which he had a way of holding level with his chest. They were the typical priest's hands, tapering smoothly away from round, plump wrists and capable of manifesting sudden animation without moving from where they were; it was as though nature had accorded them the faculty of expression which she had denied the Abbé's face.

"Jacques's fate is now in your hands, M. l'Abbé," Antoine concluded. "You alone can make Father listen to reason."

The priest did not answer, and the gaze he now gave Antoine was so aloof and sombre that the young man could draw no conclusion from it. It brought home to him his own powerlessness and the appalling difficulties of the task he had undertaken.

"And afterwards?" the Abbé softly questioned.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Supposing your father brings Jacques back to Paris, what will he do with him afterwards?"

Antoine felt embarrassed. He knew exactly what he wanted to do, but wondered how to put it, for he had the gravest doubts as to whether he could get the Abbé to approve of his plan, involving as it did Jacques's quitting his father's flat and coming to live with his brother on the ground floor of the same building. And dare he tell the priest that he meant to remove the boy almost entirely from parental authority, to take on himself alone the supervision of Jacques's education, indeed the entire control of his brother's life? When he explained this to the priest, the latter smiled, but the smile was perfectly good-humoured.

"You'd be taking on a heavy task, my friend."

"No matter!" Antoine replied impetuously. "You know I'm absolutely convinced that what the boy needs is plenty of freedom, that he'll never develop in an atmosphere of repression. You may laugh at me, sir, but I'm positive that if I took entire responsibility for him …"

But he could get nothing more out of the Abbé than another shrug of the shoulders, followed by one of his shrewd, searching glances, that seemed to come from very far away and sink so deep. He felt profoundly disheartened when he left the Abbé. After the furious rebuff from his father, the priest's unenthusiastic reception of his scheme had left him scarcely any hope. He would have been much surprised to learn that the Abbé had resolved to go to see M. Thibault that very day.

He did not need to take that trouble. When he returned, as he did every day after mass, to drink his cup of cold milk in the flat, a few steps from the Archbishop's Palace, where he lived with his sister, he found M. Thibault waiting for him in the dining-room. The big, thick-set man, sunk in a chair with his large hands resting on his legs, was still nursing his resentment. At the Abbé's entrance he rose heavily from the chair.

"So here you are?" he murmured. "I suppose my visit is a surprise to you?"

"Not so much as you suppose," the Abbé answered. Now and again the ghost of a smile and a gleam of mischievous humour lit up the impassive face. "I have an excellent detective service and there's little I'm not informed of. But will you excuse me?" he added, going towards the mug of milk awaiting him on the table.

"What's that? Do you mean you've seen …?"

The Abbé drank his milk in little sips.

"I learned how Astier was, yesterday morning, from the Duchess. But it was only last night that I heard of the withdrawal of your competitor."

"Astier? Do you mean …? I don't follow. I've not been told anything… ."

"Well, now, that's amazing!" the Abbé smiled. "Is the pleasure of breaking the good news to you to be my privilege?" He took his time. "Well, then, old Astier's had a fourth stroke; this time the poor man's doomed, and so the Dean, who's no fool, is withdrawing, leaving you as the only candidate for election to the vacant seat at the Institute of Moral Science."

"What!" M. Thibault exclaimed. "The Dean's withdrawing! But why? I don't follow."

"Because, on second thought, he realizes that the post of Registrar would be more suitable for a Dean of the Faculty of Letters, and also because he'd rather wait a few weeks for a seat that isn't contested than risk his chance against you."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"It's official. I met the permanent secretary at the gathering of the Catholic Association yesterday evening. The Dean had just called in, and he had his letter of withdrawal with him. A candidature that lasted les-° than twenty-four hours—that's rather unusual, isn't it?"

"But, in that case …!" M. Thibault panted. His surprise and delight had taken his breath away. He moved a few steps forward, without looking where he was going, his hands behind his back; then, turning to the priest, he all but embraced him. Actually he only clasped his hands.

"Ah, my dear Abbé, I shall never forget. Thank you; Thank you."

Again delight submerged him, leaving no room for any other feelings, sweeping away his anger; so much so that he had to exercise his memory when the Abbé—having without his noticing it led him to the study—asked in a perfectly natural tone:

"And what can have brought you here so early, my dear friend?"

Then he remembered Antoine, and at once his anger mastered him again. He had come, so he explained, to ask the Abbé's advice as to the attitude he should adopt towards his elder son, who had much changed lately, changed for the worse, towards a mood of unbelief and insubordination. Was he, for instance, conforming with his religious obligations? Did he go to mass? He was growing more and more erratic in his attendance at the family table—giving his patients as an excuse—and, when he did put in an appearance, behaved in a new and disagreeable manner. He contradicted his father and indulged in unthinkable liberties of speech. At the time of the recent municipal elections, the discussion had several times taken so bitter a turn that it had been necessary to tell him to hold his tongue, as if he were a small boy. In short, if Antoine was to be kept in the way he should go, some new line would have to be taken with him; in this respect M. Thibault felt that the assistance and perhaps the active intervention of his good friend the Abbé were indispensable. As an illustration, M. Thibault described the undutiful conduct of which Antoine had been guilty in going to Crouy, the foolish notions he had brought back with him, and the shocking scene that had followed. Yet all the time, the esteem in which he held Antoine and which, without his knowing it, was actually enhanced by the very acts of insubordination with which he was now reproaching him, was always evident; and the Abbé duly noted it.

Sitting listless at his desk, the priest from time to time signified his approval with little fluttering movements of his fingers on each side of the clerical bands that fell across his chest. Only when Jacques's name was mentioned did he raise his head and show signs of extreme interest. By a series of skilful, seemingly disconnected questions, he obtained confirmation from the father of all he had been told by the son.

"But really!" he exclaimed vaguely. He seemed to be talking to himself. He meditated for a few moments. M. Thibault waited, in some surprise. When the Abbé spoke again his voice was firm.

"What you tell me about Antoine's behaviour doesn't worry me as much as it does you, my friend. It was to be expected. The first effect of scientific studies on an inquiring and active mind is always to puff up a young man in his own conceit and cause his faith to waver. A little knowledge leads a man away from God; a great deal brings him back again. Don't be alarmed. Antoine's at the age when a man rushes from one extreme to another. You did well to tell me about it. I'll make a point of seeing him and talking to him oftener. None of that is very serious. Only have patience, and he'll come back to the fold.

"But what you tell me about Jacques's present life makes me feel far more anxious. I had no idea that his seclusion was of so extreme a nature. Why, the life he's leading is that of a convict, and I cannot but believe it has its perils. In fact, my dear friend, I confess I'm very worried about it. Have you given the matter your earnest consideration?"

M. Thibault smiled. "In all honesty, my dear Abbé, I can say to you as I said yesterday to Antoine: don't you realize that we are far better equipped than the common run for dealing with such problems?"

"I don't deny it," the priest agreed good-humouredly. "But the boys you usually have to deal with don't need the special handling that your younger son's peculiar temperament calls for. In any case, I gather, they are treated on a different system, they live together, have recreation hours in common, and are employed on manual work. I was, as you will remember, in favour of inflicting on Jacques a severe punishment, and I believed that a taste of somewhat prison-like surroundings might lead him to reflect and mend his ways. But, good heavens, I never dreamt of its being a real imprisonment; least of all that it would be inflicted on him for so long a period. Just think of it! A boy of scarcely fifteen has been kept alone in a cell for eight months under the supervision of an uneducated guard, as to whose probity of character you have only the assurances of the local officials. He has a few lessons—but what do you really know about this tutor from Compiègne who, in any case, devotes a mere three or four hours a week to teaching the boy? I repeat, what do you really know about him? Then again, one of the points you made was your experience. There let me remind you that I've lived amongst schoolboys for twelve years, that I'm far from ignorant of what a boy of fifteen is like. The state of physical and, worse, of moral decay into which this poor child may have fallen, without its being apparent to you—it makes one shudder!"

"Well, well!" M. Thibault exclaimed. "I'm surprised at that from you. I wouldn't have thought you so sentimentally minded," he added with a brief, ironic laugh. "But we aren't concerned with Jacques at present."

"Excuse me," the Abbé broke in, without raising his voice, "Jacques is our first concern just now. After what I've just learned, I consider that the physical and moral health of this child is being exposed to terrible risks." After seeming to ponder, he added with slow emphasis: "And he should not remain one day longer where he is."

"What!"

For a while neither spoke. It was the second time within twelve hours that M. Thibault had been touched on the raw. He felt his temper rising but kept it in check.

"We'll talk it over some other day," he said, beginning to rise. His tone implied that he was making a great concession.

"No, I'm sorry, but that will not do," the priest broke in, with unwonted vivacity. "The least one can say is that you have acted with an imprudence that is almost inexcusable." He had a way, soft but emphatic, of letting his voice linger on certain words, though his face showed no emotion, and at the same time raising his forefinger to his lips, as if to say: Mark well what I am saying. He made this gesture as he repeated: "Almost inexcusable!" After a momentary pause he said: "And now the essential thing is to remedy the evil that's been done."

"What? What do you want me to do?" M. Thibault had given up trying to restrain his anger, and faced up to the priest aggressively. "Am I going to cut short, without any reason, a treatment that has already produced such excellent results, and take that young scoundrel back into my house? Just to be once more at the mercy of his disgusting fads and fancies? No, thank you!" He clenched his fists so fiercely that the knuckles cracked, and his set teeth gave a guttural harshness to his voice. "With all due consideration, I say—emphatically—*No*!"

The Abbé's hand made a brief conciliatory gesture, implying: Have it your own way!

M. Thibault had pulled himself up heavily from his chair. Once more Jacques's fate hung in the balance.

"My dear Abbé," he went on, "I see there's no prospect of a serious talk with you this morning, so I'm off. But let me tell you, you're allowing your imagination to run away with you, exactly as Antoine did. Come now! Do I look like an unnatural father? Haven't I done everything to bring back this child to the right path, by affection and kindness, by good example and the influences of family life? Haven't I endured for years the utmost a father can endure from a son? And can you deny that all my well-meaning efforts have been wasted? Fortunately I realized in time that my duty lay along different lines and, painful as it was, I did not hesitate to take stern measures. You agreed with me then. Moreover, God in His mercy had given me some experience; I've often thought that in inspiring me with the idea of establishing that special department at Crouy, Providence enabled me to prepare in advance the remedy for a personal affliction. Have I not borne this trial with a certain courage? Would many fathers have done as I have done? Have I anything to reproach myself with? God be thanked, I have a quiet conscience." But, as he made the proud assertion, there came into his tone a note of uncertainty, as if some still small voice within were protesting against it. "My wish for every father is that his conscience may be as clear as mine!"

He opened the door, a complacent smile hovering on his face. For his parting shot, his voice had an accent of pawky humour, not without a savour that smacked of his native Norman soil.

"Luckily, my friend, I've a harder head than yours!"

He crossed the hall, followed by the Abbé, who made no reply.

On the landing he turned. "Well, well, goodbye for the present."

As he was proffering his hand, suddenly the priest began speaking in a low voice, almost to himself:

" 'Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are. … I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.' "

M. Thibault's eyelids lifted and he saw his confessor standing in the shadowy hall, with a finger on his lip.

" 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' "

Without flinching the burly "Pharisee" heard him out; his eyes were closed now and he made no movement. Presently, as the silence continued, he ventured to look up again. Without a sound the priest had closed the door on him. Left to himself, he stared for a moment at the closed door; then, shrugging his shoulders, he turned on his heel and started down the stairs. Half-way down he halted, his hand clutching the balustrade; his breath was coming in short gasps and he was jerking his jaw forward, like a horse chafing at the bit.

"No," he-murmured to himself. "No."

Without more hesitation he went on his way downstairs.

All that day he did his best to forget the interview. But in the course of the afternoon, when M. Chasle was slow in handing him a file he wanted, he had an access of rage that he had difficulty in repressing. Antoine was on duty at the hospital. Dinner that night was a silent meal. Without waiting for Gisèle to finish her dessert, M. Thibault folded his napkin and returned to his study.

Eight o'clock struck. "I might go back to him," he thought as he sat down. "It's not too late yet." But he was quite determined to do nothing of the kind. "He'll start talking to me again about Jacques. I have said no, and no it is.

"But what did he mean with the parable of the Pharisee and the publican?" he asked himself for the hundredth time. Suddenly his underlip began quivering. He had always been afraid of death. He stood up and, over the bronzes crowding the mantelpiece, scanned his face in the mirror. His features had lost the look of self-complacency that had stamped itself, indelibly as it had seemed, upon them, the look that never left them even when he was alone, even in prayer. A shudder ran through his body. His shoulders sagged and he dropped back into his chair. He was picturing himself on his deathbed, and a dread came over him that he might have to face his last hour empty-handed. He tried to reassure himself by recalling the high esteem in which the world held him.

"Still, am I not an upright man?" he kept on asking himself, but always with a rankling doubt. Words were not enough to quell his anxiety, for he was in one of those rare moods when a man delves down into himself, letting light into the dark places of his heart. With his hands clenched on the arms of his chair, he looked back on his life and found in it not one act that was wholly pure. In the twilight of his mind harrowing memories flickered into consciousness. One of them, crueller than all the rest, stung him so bitterly that he bowed his head and hid it with his hands. For the first time in his life perhaps, M. Thibault was ashamed. He knew at last that supreme self-disgust, so intolerable that no sacrifice seems too great, if only it sets a man right with his own conscience, buying divine forgiveness and restoring to the stricken heart a feeling of peace and hope of eternal salvation. Ah, to find God again! But first of all he must regain the good opinion of the priest, God's mandatory. No, he could not live an hour longer with this sense of damnable estrangement, under such obloquy.

Once he was in the open air, he felt calmer. To save time he took a cab, The Abbé opened the door; his face, under the lamp held high to see his visitor, betrayed no emotion of any kind.

"It's I," M. Thibault said mechanically, holding out his hand; then in silence he walked to the priest's study. "No, I've not come to talk to-you about Jacques," he declared, the moment he was seated. The priest's hands made a vague, conciliatory movement. "There's nothing more to be said on that subject, I assure you; you're on a false scent. But, of course, if you feel you'd like to do so, why not go to Crouy and see for yourself?" With a rather naive abruptness he continued: "Forgive me for my bad temper this morning. You know how easily roused I am. But really, well, at bottom I'm … Look here, you were too hard on me, you know. Much too hard on the 'Pharisee' you take me for! I'm perfectly justified in protesting—perfectly! Why, for thirty years haven't I been giving all my time, all my energies, to good works—not to mention the greater part of my income? And all the thanks I get is to be told by a priest, who is my personal friend, that I'm … Come now, own up, it's not fair!"

The Abbé looked at his penitent, and the look implied: "Pride is showing through again, for all you try to mask it, in every word you say."

There was a long silence, broken at last by M. Thibault.

"My dear Abbé," he said in an uneasy tone, "I admit I'm not altogether … Well, yes, I admit it; only too often I … But that's the way I'm built, if you see what I mean. You know that well enough, don't you?" He seemed to be pleading for the priest's indulgence. "Ah, it's a strait and narrow path indeed—and you're the only one who can guide me, keep me from stumbling… ."

Suddenly he murmured in a broken voice: "I'm getting old, I'm afraid… ."

The Abbé was touched by the change in his tone. Feeling he had been silent overlong, he drew his chair nearer to M. Thibault's and began to speak.

"It's I who now feel unsure of myself, and, indeed, my dear friend, what should I add, now that the holy words have sunk so deep into your heart?" He mused for a while before continuing. "I know well that God has placed you in a difficult position; the work you do for Him gives you authority over other men, and honours—and that is as it should be. Yet it may possibly incline you sometimes to confound His glory with your own. And might not this lead you, little by little, even to prefer yours to His?"

M. Thibault's eyes were for once wide open, and showed no sign of closing; there was consternation in their pale intensity, and a gleam of almost childish awe.

"And yet remember!" the Abbé went on. "*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*. That alone counts, and nothing else should weigh with us. You, my friend, are one of the strong ones of the earth, and the strong are usually proud. Oh, I know how hard it is to control the driving force of pride, to direct it into its proper channel. How hard it is not to live for onself, not to forget God, even when all one's life is taken up with acts of piety! Not to be amongst those of whom Our Lord once spoke so sadly: 'This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.' "

"Ah, yes," M. Thibault cried excitedly, without lowering his eyes, "indeed it's hard! No one on earth knows as well as I do how terribly hard it is."

In self-humiliation he was finding a delightful anodyne, and he was vaguely conscious, too, that by this attitude he might regain the priest's esteem, without having to make concessions in the matter of Jacques's detention. And a secret force within him urged him to go still further, to prove the depth of his faith by an astounding declaration and the display of an unlooked-for nobility. No price would be too high if he could force the respect of his friend the priest.

"Listen, Abbé!" he exclaimed; for a moment his face had the same resolute expression that was often Antoine's. "Listen! If until now my pride has made of me a miserable sinner, has not God offered me this very day an opportunity to make—to make atonement?" He hesitated, as though engaged in an inner struggle. And indeed at that moment he was struggling against himself. The Abbé saw him trace the sign of the cross rapidly with his thumb across his waistcoat, above his heart. "I am thinking about this election, you understand. That would be a genuine sacrifice, a sacrifice of my pride, since you told me this morning that my election was assured. Well, then, I … But wait! There's vanity even in this. Shouldn't I keep silent and do it without telling anyone, even you? But … let it be! Very well, then, Abbé, I make a vow to withdraw tomorrow, and for ever, my candidature for the Institute."

The Abbé made a gesture that M. Thibault did not see; he had turned his eyes towards the crucifix hanging on the wall.

"O Lord," he prayed, "have mercy on me, a sinner!"

He put into the prayer a residue of self-satisfaction that he himself did not suspect, for pride is so deep-rooted that, at the very moment of his most fervent repentance, he was savouring his humility with a passionate thrill of pride. The priest gazed at him intently; he could not help wondering how far the man before him was sincere. And yet at that moment there shone on M. Thibault's face the illumination of a mystic who has made the great renunciation; it seemed to obliterate the puffiness and wrinkles, giving the time-worn features the innocence of a child's face. The priest could hardly believe his eyes. He was ashamed of the rather despicable satisfaction he had felt that morning at confounding this gross Pharisee. Their roles were being reversed. He turned his mind's eye on his own life. Was it really for the sole glory of God that he had been so ready to abandon his pupils and canvass his present exalted post, with its pomp and prestige? And was there not something sinful in the pleasure he felt, day after day, in the exercise of that diplomatic adroitness which was his specialty—even if it was exercised in the service of his Church?

"Tell me honestly, do you believe that God will pardon me?"

The tremor of anxiety in M. Thibault's voice recalled the Abbé to his function of spiritual director. Clasping his hands beneath his chin, he bent his head, and forced a smile onto his lips.

"I have not tried to stop you," he said, "and I have let you drain the cup of bitterness to its dregs. And I am very sure that the divine compassion will take into account this moment of your life. But"— he raised his forefinger—"the intention is enough, and your true duty is not to carry out the sacrifice to the end. Do not protest. It is I, your confessor, who free you from your vow. Indeed God's glory will be better served by your election than by this gesture of renunciation. Your family and your wealth impose obligations which you must not ignore. That title 'Member of the Institute' will confer on you, amongst the great republicans of the conservative group, who are the backbone of our country, an added authority, and one which we consider necessary for the advancement of the highest interests of our faith. You have at all times submitted your life to our guidance. That being so, let the Church, speaking through my lips, show you once more the course to take. God declines your sacrifice, my dear friend; hard as it may be, you must bow to His will. *Gloria in excelsis!*"

As he spoke, the priest had been watching M. Thibault's face and had noticed how its traits had gradually changed, readjusting themselves and settling back to their normal composure. At the last words he had lowered his eyelids, and it was impossible to guess what was passing in his mind. The priest, in giving him back his seat in the Institute, an ambition of twenty years' standing, had given him back life. But the effects of the tremendous struggle he had gone through had not yet worn off; he was still in an emotional mood, thrilled with a sense of infinite gratitude. At the same moment both men had the same impulse. Bowing his head, the priest began to offer humble thanks to God, and when he looked up again he saw M. Thibault already on his knees, gazing heavenwards with unseeing eyes, his face lit up with joy. His moist lips were quivering, his hairy hands—so bloated that they looked as if the fingers had been stung by wasps—were locked in an ecstasy of fervour. Why did this edifying spectacle suddenly strike the priest as unbearable to see—so much so that he could not help stretching out his arm till it all but touched the penitent?

He checked the gesture at once, and laid his hand affectionately on the shoulder of M. Thibault. The latter rose with an effort from his knees.

"Everything has not been settled yet," the priest reminded him, with the inflexible gentleness that was his characteristic. "You must come to a decision about Jacques."

M. Thibault seemed to stiffen up, suddenly, violently.

The Abbé sat down.

"Do not follow the example of those who think they have done all they need do because they have faced some arduous duty, while neglecting the one that is immediate, close at hand. Even if the ordeal you have made this child undergo has. not been so injurious as I fear, do not prolong it. Think of the servant who buried the talent his master entrusted to him. Come now, my friend, do not leave this room till you have dealt faithfully by all your responsibilities."

M. Thibault remained standing, shaking his head, but much of the obstinacy had gone out of his expression. The Abbé rose.

"The difficult problem," he murmured, "is how to avoid producing an impression of having given way to Antoine." He saw that he had hit the mark, took a few steps, and suddenly began to speak in a cool, business-like tone. "Do you know what I'd do, my friend, if I were in your place? I'd say to him: 'So you want your brother to leave the reformatory, do you? Yes? And you're still of the same opinion? Very well, then, I take you at your word, go and fetch him—and keep him with you; you want him back, and it's for you to take charge of him.' "

M. Thibault made no response. The priest went on speaking:

"I'd go even further. This is what I'd tell him: 'I don't want Jacques at home at all; arrange things as you please. You always look as if you thought we didn't know how to deal with him. Very well, have a try yourself!' And I'd saddle him with the full responsibility for Jacques. I'd give them a place where they could live together—near you, of course, so that they could have their meals at home. But I'd give Antoine entire charge of his brother. Don't say no, my dear friend," he added, though M. Thibault had made no movement of any kind. "Wait, let me finish; my idea is not so fantastic as it may seem."

He returned to his desk and sat down, resting his elbows on the table.

"Firstly: it's quite likely that Jacques will put up with his elder brother's authority more easily than with yours, and I'm inclined to believe that if he enjoys greater freedom, he may lose that spirit of revolt and insubordination which has been so distressing in the past.

"Secondly: as regards Antoine, his levelheadedness entitles him to our entire trust. If you take him at his word, I'm convinced he won't reject this chance of freeing his brother. And, as to those regrettable tendencies we were talking of this morning, a small cause can have great results. In my opinion the fact of being responsible for the spiritual welfare of another will tend to counteract them, and we shall find him coming back to a less—a less anarchical conception of society, and morals, and religion.

"Thirdly: your parental authority, once it is spared the friction of everyday contacts which wear it down and disperse its efficacy, will keep its prestige intact; you'll be able to use it for that general supervision of your sons which is its prerogative and—how shall I put it?—its main function.

"Finally" —his tone grew confidential— "I must confess that, at the moment of your election, it strikes me as desirable that Jacques shall have left Crouy, and that the whole unhappy episode should be put out of mind. Celebrity attracts all sorts of interviews and inquiries, and you would be a target for the indiscretions of the press. That's an entirely secondary consideration, I know; yet all the same …"

M. Thibault could not restrain a glance betraying his uneasiness. Though he would not admit it to himself, he knew that it would salve his conscience if the "prisoner" were released; in fact the plan suggested by the priest had everything in its favour. It would save his face *vis-à-vis* Antoine and bring Jacques back to normal life without his having to trouble about the boy.

"If I could be sure," he said at last, "that the young rascal after being released wouldn't bring new scandals upon us …"

The Abbé knew that he had gained his point. He undertook to exercise a discreet supervision over the two boys, anyhow during the first few months. Then he accepted an invitation to dine on the following day, and to take part in an interview M. Thibault would arrange for with his son.

M. Thibault rose to go. A weight had been lifted off his heart and he felt a new man. Still, just as he was shaking hands with his confessor, he felt a final qualm of conscience.

"May God in His compassion forgive me for being the man I am." There was a note of sadness in his voice.

The priest beamed on him, and recited in a low voice, like a benediction:

" 'What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?' " A sudden smile lit up his face; he raised a finger to emphasize the words. " 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.' "

# VI

ONE morning—it was barely nine—the concierge of the building where Mme. de Fontanin lived asked to have a word with her. A "young person," it seemed, wanted to see her but would neither go up to the flat nor give a name.

"A 'young person'? Do you mean a woman?"

"A little girl."

Mme. de Fontanin's first impulse was to refuse to see her; the visit had probably to do with one of Jerome's love-affairs; or was it blackmail?

"She's quite a child," the concierge remarked.

"I'll see her."

It was indeed a child whom she found hiding in the darkness of the concierge's "lodge," a child who met her eyes reluctantly.

"Why, it's Nicole!" Mme. de Fontanin cried when she recognized Noémie Petit-Dutreuil's daughter. Nicole was on the point of throwing herself into her aunt's arms, but she checked the impulse. All the colour had gone out of her face and she was looking haggard, but she was not crying, and though her eyes seemed unnaturally large and her nerves were obviously on edge, she had complete control of herself.

"I'd like to speak to you, Auntie."

"Come along upstairs."

"No, not in your flat."

"Why?"

"I'd rather not, please."

"But why? I'm all by myself in the flat this morning." She realized Nicole was uncertain what to do. "Daniel's at school and Jenny's gone to her piano lesson. I shall be alone till lunch. Now come along upstairs."

Nicole followed her without a word. Mme. de Fontanin led her to her bedroom.

"What's the matter?" She could not conceal her mistrust. "Who told you to come here? Where have you come from?"

Nicole looked at her without lowering her eyes, but her eyelids were fluttering.

"I've run away."

"Run away!" Mme. de Fontanin looked distressed. Yet, at the same time she felt relieved. "And what made you come to us?"

Nicole made a movement with her shoulders that implied: "Where could I go? There's nobody else."

"Sit down, darling. Now let's see… . You're looking dreadfully tired. By the by, are you hungry?"

"Well, a bit," she confessed with a timid smile.

"Why ever didn't you say so at once?" Mme. de Fontanin smiled and led Nicole into the dining-room. When she saw with what appetite the little girl fell on the bread and butter, she went and fetched what remained of some cold meat from the sideboard. Nicole ate without saying a word, ashamed of showing such voracity but unable to conceal her hunger. The colour was coming back to her cheeks. She drank two cups of tea in quick succession.

"How long is it since your last meal?" Mme. de Fontanin asked. She was looking even more upset than the little girl. "Are you feeling cold, dear?"

"No, thank you."

"But you must be. You're shivering."

Nicole made a petulant gesture; she was always angry with herself for not being able to conceal her moments of weakness.

"I travelled all night. I expect that's why I'm feeling a bit cold."

"You travelled all night! Where on earth have you come from?"

"From Brussels."

"Good heavens! All by yourself?"

"Yes," Nicole answered in a level voice, "all by myself." The firmness of her tone showed that she had acted not on caprice but a set purpose. Mme. de Fontanin took her hand.

"You're freezing, child! Come along to my bedroom. Wouldn't you like to lie down and sleep a bit? You can tell me all about it later."

"No, I'd rather tell you now, while we're alone. Besides, I'm not sleepy. Really, I'm quite all right now."

It was one of the first days in April. Mme. de Fontanin wrapped a shawl round the little runaway, lit the fire, and tried to get her to sit in front of it. At first the child resisted, but at last she gave way. She seemed in a highly nervous state, her eyes were shining with a hard, unnatural fixity, and she was staring at the clock on the mantelpiece. Obviously she was eager to speak, but, now she was seated beside her aunt, had suddenly become tongue-tied. Not to increase her embarrassment, Mme. de Fontanin refrained from looking at her.

Minutes passed, and still Nicole did not say anything. Mme. de Fontanin decided to speak first.

"Whatever you've done, dear, no one here will ask you anything about it. Keep your secret, if you'd rather do so. I'm grateful to you for having thought of coming to us. You're like a daughter here, you know."

Nicole stiffened up, startled by the thought that she was being suspected of having done something wrong, something she disliked confessing. She made a sudden movement that let slip the shawl from her shoulders, revealing the curves of a healthy young body, strangely incongruous with her haggard cheeks and the immaturity of her features.

"It's not that at all!" Her eyes were flashing. "And now I'm going to tell you everything." Her voice had an almost aggressive harshness as she began her story.

"You remember, Auntie, the day you came to see us at our flat in the Rue de Monceau …?"

"Yes, indeed!" Mme. de Fontanin sighed, and again a look of anguish crossed her face.

"Well, I heard everything, every word!" The words came with a rush; her eyelids were quivering.

There was a pause.

"I knew it, my dear."

The child stifled a sob and hid her face with her hands as if the tears were flowing from her eyes. But almost at once she took her hands away; her eyes were dry, and her lips tightly set—which changed not only the expression of her face but the quality of her voice.

"Don't think hardly of her, please, Aunt Thérèse. She's so dreadfully unhappy, you know. You do believe me, don't you?"

"Yes." A question was hovering on Mme. de Fontanin's lips, and she looked at the girl with a calm that carried no conviction. "Tell me, is—is your Uncle Jerome at Brussels, too?"

"Yes." For a moment she was silent, then her eyebrows lifted and she added: "Why, it was he who gave me the idea of running away, of coming here."

"What! He told you to run away?"

"Well, no, not exactly that. You see, he'd been coming every morning all last week. He gave me some money to buy myself food, as I'd been left all alone. Then the day before yesterday he said: 'If some kind soul would find room for you, it would be much better for you than staying here.' 'Some kind soul,' he said, and of course I thought of you at once, Aunt Thérèse. And I'm sure he had the same idea. Don't you think so?"

"Very likely," Mme. de Fontanin murmured. And suddenly a feeling of such happiness swept over her that she all but smiled.

Eagerly she asked: "How did you come to be alone? Where ever were you?"

"At home."

"In Brussels?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know your mother had gone to live in Brussels."

"We had to, at the end of November. Everything was sold up at our place in Paris. Mummy never has any luck, she's always in trouble, with bailiffs coming round for money. But now the debts have been paid off, she'll be able to return."

Mme. de Fontanin looked up quickly, on the brink of asking: "*Who* is paying them?" And so obvious was the question in her gaze that she could read its unspoken answer on the little girl's lips. She could not restrain herself from asking:

"And *he*—he left in November, with her, I suppose?"

There was such anguish in her voice that Nicole did not answer for a while. At last she forced herself to speak.

"Auntie, you mustn't be cross with me; I don't want to hide anything from you, but it's so difficult to explain everything, all at once. Do you know M. Arvelde?"

"No. Who is he?"

"He's a wonderful violinist who used to give me lessons here. He's a really great artist, you know; he plays in concerts."

"Well?"

"He lived in Paris, but he's a Belgian really. That's why, when we had to run away, he took us to Belgium. He has a house of his own in Brussels, and we stayed there."

"With him?"

"Yes." She had understood the question and did not shirk it; indeed she seemed to find a certain perverse pleasure in vanquishing her reticence. But for the moment she did not dare to say more.

After a rather long pause Mme. de Fontanin spoke again.

"But where were you living during these last few days, when you were by yourself and Uncle Jerome came to see you?"

"There."

"At that Belgian gentleman's house, you mean?"

"Yes."

"And did your uncle visit you there?"

"Why, of course."

"But how did you come to be alone?" Mme. de Fontanin's voice had lost none of its gentleness.

"Because M. Raoul is on tour just now, in Lucerne and Geneva."

"M. Raoul? Who is that?"

"M. Arvelde."

"So your mother left you alone in Brussels to go to Switzerland with him?" The little girl's gesture was so desperate, so pitiful, that Mme. de Fontanin blushed. "You must forgive me, darling," she added weakly. "Don't let's talk any more about all this. You've come here and that's quite all right, and I hope you'll stay with us."

Nicole shook her head energetically.

"No, no, there's not much more to tell." She took a deep breath, then broke into a voluble explanation. "This is what's happened, Auntie. M. Arvelde has gone to Switzerland. But Mamma didn't go with him. He had got her an engagement at a theatre in Brussels; she's playing in a light opera—because of her voice, you know; he made her work hard at her singing, and she's been awfully successful, really. They talk about her in the papers; I've got the clippings in my bag—would you like to see them?" She stopped suddenly, uncertain of her ground. A curious look came into her eyes as she went on. "So you see it was just because M. Raoul went to Switzerland that Uncle Jerome came, but it was too late. When he arrived Mamma had left the house. One evening she came and kissed me. No, that's not true." Her eyebrows knitted, and she continued in a low, forlorn voice: "She didn't kiss me, she almost beat me, because she didn't know what on earth to do with me." Raising her eyes, she forced a smile to her lips. "Oh, no, she wasn't really angry with me; it wasn't that at all." A sob broke from the smiling lips. "She was so awfully unhappy, Aunt Thérèse; you simply can't imagine. She had to go, as someone was waiting for her downstairs, and she knew Uncle Jerome would be coming soon, because he'd been to see us several times; he even played music with M. Raoul. But, the last time, he said he wouldn't come again while M.

Arvelde was there. So, just before she went out, Mamma told me to tell Uncle Jerome that she'd gone away for a long time, that she was leaving me behind and he was to look after me. I'm sure he would have done so, only I didn't dare to say it when I saw the way he looked when he came and found her gone. He was so terribly angry, I was afraid he might go after them, so I had to tell him a lie. I said Mamma was coming back next day; and every day I told him I was expecting her. He kept on hunting for her high and low; he thought she was still in Brussels. But everything was so awful, I felt I simply couldn't stay there any longer—because of M. Raoul's valet especially. He's such a nasty man; I hate him!" She shivered. "Oh, Aunt Thérèse, he has such horrible eyes—I can't bear him! So, the day Uncle Jerome spoke to me about some kind soul, all of a sudden I made up my mind. Yesterday morning, when he gave me a little money, I went out at once so that the servant shouldn't take it from me. I hid in churches until the evening, and I caught the slow night train."

She had told her story hastily, with lowered eyes. When she raised her head and saw the look of profound disgust and indignation on Mme. de Fontanin's face, she clasped her hands imploringly.

"Oh, Aunt Thérèse, please don't think unkindly of Mamma; it really wasn't her fault at all. I'm not always nice and I'm really a dreadful nuisance to her; you understand, don't you? But I'm grown up now, and I don't want to go on with that life any more. I couldn't bear it!" Her mouth set in a look of firm resolve. "I want to work, to earn my living, and not be a drag on anyone. That's why I've come, Aunt Thérèse. There's no one else but you. Please tell me how to set about it, please, Auntie. You won't mind looking after me, will you? Just for a few days."

Mme. de Fontanin was too deeply moved to reply at once. Could she ever have believed this child would one day become so dear to her? There was a world of tenderness in her eyes as she gazed at Nicole, an affection that warmed her own heart, too, and allayed her distress. The little girl was not so pretty as she used to be; those feverish days had left their mark, and an ugly rash blemished the young lips—but her deep blue eyes were lovelier than ever. Just now they seemed dilated, unnaturally large, yet what courage and what steadfastness shone in their limpid depths! … At last, smiling, she leaned towards the little girl.

"Darling, I quite understand. I respect your decision and I promise to help you. But for the present you're going to live here, with us; it's rest you need." She said "rest," but her eyes implied "affection." Nicole read their meaning, but she still refused to soften.

"I want to work; I don't want to be a charge on anyone, any longer."

"What if your mother comes back to fetch you?"

Her clear gaze grew misted; then suddenly an unbelievable hardness came over it.

"I'll never go back to her. Never!" Her voice was harsh with bitter resolution.

Mme. de Fontanin made as if she had not heard, and merely said:

"I—I'd very much like to keep you with us—for always!"

The girl rose unsteadily, then suddenly sank onto the floor and laid her head on her aunt's knees. As Mme. de Fontanin stroked the child's cheek, her mind was busy with a delicate problem which she felt it her duty to settle once for all.

"My dear, you've seen a great many things that a girl of your age oughtn't to have seen," she began.

Nicole tried to rise, but Mme. de Fontanin prevented her. She did not want the child to see her blushing. As she held the girl's forehead to her knee, unthinkingly she was winding a strand of golden hair round her finger, groping in her mind for the right words to say. "And you must have guessed a number of things, things which, I think, had better remain a secret. You understand me, don't you?" Nicole had moved her head and was looking up at her. A sudden light came into the child's eyes.

"Oh, Aunt Thérèse, you can be sure of that. I won't breathe a word to anyone. They wouldn't understand; they'd say Mamma was to blame."

She was as bent on concealing her mother's weakness as Mme. de Fontanin was on concealing Jerome's. The strange complicity that was springing up between the little girl and Mme. de Fontanin was sealed by Nicole's next remark. She was standing, her face lit up with eagerness.

"Listen, Aunt Thérèse. This is what you must tell them: that Mamma has been obliged to earn her living and has found a situation abroad— in England, let's say. A situation that has prevented her from taking me with her. As French teacher in a school, we might tell them." A childish smile hovered on her lips as she added: "And, as Mamma's away, there'll be nothing surprising if I seem rather sad, will there?"

# VII

THE “gay old spark” on the ground floor moved out on the fifteenth of April.

On the next morning Mile, de Waize, preceded by two maids, by Mme. Friihling the concierge, and a handy man, went to take possession of the little bachelor flat. The reputation of its previous occupant had been anything but savoury and Mademoiselle, drawing her black merino mantle round her shoulders, waited until all the windows had been opened before crossing the threshold. Then only did she risk entering the little hall of the flat and making a thorough inspection of the rooms. Though somewhat reassured by the immaculate bareness of the walls, she directed the rite of cleansing in the spirit of an exorcist.

Much to Antoine’s surprise the worthy spinster had agreed almost without protest to the idea of the two brothers’ being installed outside the parental walls, though such a project must have run counter to all her notions of home-life as it should be lived, and played havoc with her views of the Family and Education. Antoine accounted for Mademoiselle’s attitude by the pleasure she felt at Jacques’s return, and the respect in which she held the decisions of M. Thibault, above all when they had the commendation of the Abbé Vécard.

As a matter of fact there was another reason for Mademoiselle’s almost enthusiastic acquiescence: the relief she felt at seeing Antoine leave the flat. Ever since she had taken Gise under her wing the poor old lady had lived in constant terror of infectious diseases. One spring she had actually kept Gise imprisoned in her room for six weeks, not daring to let her take the air elsewhere than on the balcony and delaying the departure of the whole family to their summer residence, because little Lisbeth Friihling, the concierge’s niece, had whooping-cough and, to leave the house, it would have been necessary to pass in front of the concierge’s premises on the ground floor. Naturally Antoine, with his clothes redolent of the hospital, his medical books and instruments, seemed to her a source of daily peril in their midst. She had begged him never to take Gise on his knee. If, on coming home, by some unlucky chance he dropped his overcoat across a chair in the hall instead of taking it to his room, or if he arrived late and came to table without washing his hands—though she knew he did not wear an overcoat when seeing patients, and never left the hospital without first visiting the lavatory—she was too terrified, too obsessed by fears of “germs,” to eat, and, the moment dessert came on the table, would sweep Gise away with her to her room and inflict on her a fiercely antiseptic washing of throat and nostrils. To install Antoine on the ground floor meant creating a protective zone of two stories between Gisèle and him, and diminishing to that extent the peril of infection. Thus she displayed particular zest in preparing for the bearer of contagions this remote quarantine. In three days the rooms were scraped clean, washed, carpeted, and equipped with curtains and furniture.

All was ready now for Jacques’s return.

Every time she thought of him, her activity redoubled; or else she would indulge in a sentimental breathing-space, conjuring up before her melting eyes the well-loved face. Her affection for Gise had by no means ousted Jacques from his priority in her regard. She had doted on him since he was born; indeed she had loved him even longer than that, for she had loved and brought up, before him, the mother whom he had never known, whose place she had taken from the cradle. It was between her outstretched arms that one evening, tottering along the carpet in the hall, Jacques had taken, towards her, his first step; and for fourteen successive years she had trembled for him as now she trembled for Gisèle. And with boundless love went total incomprehension. The boy, from whom she scarcely ever took her eyes, remained a mystery to her. There were days when she gave up hope—so “inhuman” did she find the child—and then she would weep, recalling Mme. Thibault’s childhood, for Jacques’s mother had been as meek and mild as an angel out of heaven. She never tried to puzzle out from whom Jacques had inherited his propensity for violence, and could blame only the Devil. And yet there were days when one of those sudden, impulsive gestures in which the child’s heart suddenly flowered forth would quicken her emotion, making her weep again, but now with joy.

She had never been able to get used to Jacques’s absence nor had she ever been able to understand the reasons for his exile. Now she wanted his return to be a festive occasion and his new room to contain everything he loved. Antoine had to put his foot down or she would have crammed the cupboards full of his old toys. She had brought down from her own room his favourite arm-chair, the chair in which he had always used to sit when a black mood was on him; and, on Antoine’s advice, she had replaced Jacques’s old bed by a brand-new sofa-bed which, folded up in the day, gave the room the dignity of a study.

Meanwhile Gisèle had been left to her own devices for two days, but with plenty of work to keep her out of mischief. Try as she might, she could not fix her attention on her lesson-books. She was dying of curiosity to see what was happening down below. She knew her Jacquot was going to return, that all this commotion was on his account, and, to calm her nerves, kept pacing up and down the room, which seemed to her a prison-cell.

On the third morning she could bear it no longer, and the temptation was so strong that at noon, noticing that her aunt had not come up again, she ran out of her room without more ado and raced down the stairs, four steps at a time. Antoine was just coming in. She burst out laughing. Antoine had a special way of looking at her—a stolid, concentrated glare he had invented for their mutual amusement— that never failed to send her off into peals of uncontrollable laughter, which lasted as long as Antoine could retain his gravity. Mademoiselle used to scold them both for it. But just now they were alone, and the occasion was too good to miss.

“What are you laughing at?” he said at last, catching hold of her wrists. She struggled, laughing all the more. Suddenly she stopped.

“I really must get out of this habit of laughing. If I don’t, you know, nobody will ever want to marry me.”

“So you want to get married, do you?”

“Yes,” she said, gazing up at him. There was a mildness in her gaze that brought to mind the eyes of a large, sentimental dog. Looking down at her plump little body, with its wild-flower grace, he reflected for the first time that this imp of eleven would one day become a woman, would marry. He let go her wrists.

“Where were you rushing off to like that, by yourself, without even a hat or a shawl on? Don’t you know it’s lunch-time?”

"I'm looking for Auntie. She's given me a sum I can't make out," she added with a little giggle. Then, blushing, she pointed to the mystery-laden door from which a single ray of light was streaming. Her eyes were shining in the dimness of the vestibule.

"You'd like to have a look at it, eh?"

She made a "yes" with a flutter of her red lips, soundlessly.

"You're in for a scolding, I warn you," Antoine smiled.

She hesitated, eyed him boldly to see if he were joking. Then she made up her mind.

"No, why should I be scolded? It's not a sin."

Antoine laughed; he had recognized Mademoiselle's phraseology for Right and Wrong. He fell to wondering what effect the old maid's influence was having on the child. A glance at Gisèle reassured him; she was a healthy plant which would flourish in any soil and defy the gardener's restraint.

Her eyes were still fixed on the half-opened door.

"Well, why don't you go in and have a look round?" Antoine said.

As she slipped in like a scared mouse, she stifled a cry of joy.

Mademoiselle was alone. She had climbed onto the sofa-bed and, standing tip-toe, was straightening the crucifix she had just hung on the wall; it was the crucifix she had given Jacques for his first communion, and it was still to watch over her dear one's sleep. She seemed gay, happy, young, and was singing as she worked. She had recognized Antoine's step in the entrance-hall, and thought she must have forgotten the time. Meanwhile Gisèle had made an inspection of the other rooms and, unable to restrain her glee, had begun dancing and clapping her hands.

"Good heavens!" Mademoiselle exclaimed, jumping down from the bed. In a mirror she saw her niece, her hair streaming in the breeze from an open window, capering like a young fawn, and screaming at the top of her voice.

"Hurrah for lovely draughts! Hurrah!"

She did not understand, did not try to understand. The idea that an act of willful disobedience might account for the little girl's presence here never crossed her mind; for sixty-six years she had been in the habit of bowing to the exigencies of fate. She made a dash at the child and, unhooking her cape, wrapped her hastily in its folds, and without a word of reproach hurried her out. And, after making Gisèle run up the stairs even quicker than she had run down them, she did not draw breath till she had put the child in bed under a warm blanket and made her drink a bowl of boiling-hot herb-tea.

It must be admitted her fears were not entirely groundless. Gisèle's mother, a Madagascan whom Major de Waize had married in Tama-tave, where he was garrisoned, had died of tuberculosis, less than a year after the birth of the child; two years later the Major himself had succumbed to a slow, never fully diagnosed disease that was thought to have been transmitted to him by his wife. Ever since Mademoiselle, the orphan's only relative, had had her sent home from Madagascar and taken charge of her, the dangers of hereditary disease had constantly obsessed her, though actually the child had never had a serious cold in her life, and the various doctors and specialists who examined her each year had never found the least flaw in her healthy constitution.

The election for the Institute was taking place in a fortnight, and M. Thibault seemed in a hurry to have Jacques back. It was arranged that M. Faisme should personally escort him to Paris on the following Sunday.

On the previous Saturday evening, Antoine left the hospital at seven o'clock, dined at a neighbouring restaurant so as to escape the family dinner, and, round about eight, alone and in high spirits, took possession of his new domain, where he was to sleep that night for the first time. He found a pleasure in the feel of his private key turning in the lock, in slamming his own door behind him, and, after switching on all the lights, began to walk slowly from room to room, with the zest of a conqueror exploring a new-won kingdom. He had reserved for himself the side looking out on the street: two big rooms and a dressing-room. The first large room had little furniture in it: only a few chairs of various shapes and sizes grouped round a small circular table. This was to serve as the waiting-room, when patients came to consult him. Into the second room, which was the larger of the two, he had moved the furniture belonging to him in his father's flat, his big desk, his bookshelves, his two leather arm-chairs, and all the various accessories of his industrious hours. His bed was in the dressing-room, which also contained a washstand and wardrobe.

His books were stacked on the hall floor alongside his unopened trunks. The heating-apparatus was emitting a gentle warmth, and brand-new electric lamps shed an uncompromising brilliance on everything in the flat. Antoine had the rest of the evening before him to set his house in order; he made up his mind to have everything unpacked and in its appointed place—a congenial setting for the new life that was beginning—within the next few hours. He pictured the dinner in the flat above drawing to its dreary close: Gisèle drowsing over her dessert; M. Thibault, as usual, perorating. And Antoine relished the peace around him, and the inestimable boon of solitude.

The glass over the mantelpiece reflected him half length. He drew near it, not without a certain self-satisfaction. He had a way of his own with mirrors, and always viewed himself full face, squared his shoulders, and clenched his jaws, while his eyes seemed boring almost angrily into their reflected selves. He preferred not to see his lanky torso, short legs, and somewhat puny arms, for the disproportion between his rather undersized body and the bulkiness of his head, the volume of which was increased by the thick beard, was distasteful to him. But he approved of himself; he regarded himself as a fine figure of a man, built on exemplary lines. What particularly pleased him was the look of grim determination on his face, for, by dint of creasing his forehead as if he felt obliged to concentrate his full attention on each incident of daily life, a bulge had formed at the level of his brows, which, overshadowing his eyes, imparted to them a curious piercingness that pleased him as the outward sign of an indomitable will.

He decided to begin with his books, and, taking off his coat, started by giving a vigorous tug to the closed doors of the empty bookcase. Let's see now, he mused. Lecture note-books at the bottom, dictionaries within easy reach; medical manual—yes, that's the place for it. Tra la la! he hummed light-heartedly. Well, well, here I am, I got my way. The ground-floor flat; Jacques. It all panned out—who'd have believed that possible three weeks ago? He began to speak aloud, in a high-pitched voice, impersonating an admirer. "That chap Thibault has an in-dom-i-ta-ble will. Never knows when he's beaten. Indomitable!" Casting a humorous glance at the mirror, he cut a caper, which all but dislodged the pile of books and pamphlets he was propping under his chin. Steady now! he adjured himself. That's better. My shelves are coming to life again. Now for the manuscripts. Oh, for this evening, let's put the files back into the file-case, as they were before. But one of these days we'll have to sort them out, all those notes and comments. Quite a

lot I've got together. The important thing is to have a simple, efficient system for classifying them; with an index, of course, that I keep absolutely up to date. Like Philip's. Yes, a card-index. Of course, all the great doctors …

Gaily, with an almost dancing step, he moved to and fro between the hall and the bookcase. Suddenly he emitted a boyish laugh, which came as a surprise. "Dr. Antoine Thibault!" he announced, haldng for a moment and straightening his shoulders. "It's Dr. Thibault! Of course you've heard of him; the child specialist!" He side-stepped nimbly, made a rapid bow, then, sobering down, resumed his journeys to and fro between the hall and study. The wicker basket, next. In two years' time I'll annex the Gold Medal. House physician at a clinic. Hospital diploma. So I'm setting up here for three or four years at most. Again he mimicked a high falsetto voice: "Thibault is one of our youngest hospital staff doctors; Philip's right-hand man." I got on the right scent when I specialized at once on children's diseases. When I think of Louiset, Touron, and the rest of them—the damned fools!

Damned fools! he repeated absent-mindedly. His arms were full of all sorts of objects and he was looking round perplexedly for the best place for each. Pity Jacques doesn't want to be a doctor. I could help him, I'd see him through. Two Thibaults as doctors! Why not, after all? It's a career worthy of a Thibault. Hard, I grant you, but how rewarding, when one has a taste for fighting against odds, and a bit of. personal pride! Think of all the attention, memory, will-power it demands! And one never gets to the end of it. And consider what it means when one's made good! A great doctor, that's somebody! A Philip, for instance. One has to learn, of course, how to adopt that gentle, assured manner. Very courteous, but distant. Yes, it's pleasant to be someone, to be called in for consultations by the colleagues who're most envious of one!

Personally I've chosen the most difficult branch: children. Yes, they're the trickiest cases; never know how to tell you what's wrong and, when they do, lead you all astray. That's it; with children one can count only on oneself; got to face up to the disease and hit the diagnosis. X-rays luckily … A competent doctor today has got to be a radiologist, and know how to use the apparatus himself. Soon as I've taken my M.D., I'll take a course on X-rays. And later on, next door to my consulting-room, there'll be an X-ray room. With a nurse. No, a male assistant's better; in a white coat. On consulting days, for every case that's in the least complicated—zip!—a photo.

"What gives me confidence in Dr. Thibault is that he always begins with an X-ray examination."

He smiled at the sound of his own voice, and winked towards the mirror. Why, yes, I don't deny it, that's Pride, with a capital P! He laughed ironically. The Thibault pride, as Abbé Vécard calls it. My father, too, of course. But I—oh, well, let it go at that! It's pride. Why not? Pride comes in very useful as a driving force. I make good use of it, too. Why shouldn't I? Isn't it up to a man to make the most of his talents? What are my talents, now? He smiled. Easy to answer that. For one thing, I'm quick at getting things, and I'm retentive; what I know sticks. Next, I can work. "That chap Thibault works like a horse!" So much the better; let 'em say it if they want to, they'd all like to be able to do as much. And then, what more? Energy. Definitely that. "An extraor-di-nar-y energy!" He said it out loud, syllable by syllable, turning again to the mirror. It's like a battery; well, a charged cell, always on tap for any effort I require of it. But what would all those talents come to, if there wasn't a driving force to actuate them? Tell me that, M. l'Abbé! He was holding in his hand a flat, nickel-plated instrument-case that gleamed under the ceiling light, and was wondering where to put it. Finally he reached up and placed it on the top of the bookcase. "Eh, lad, it's naught to be ashamed of!" he shouted in the jovial, bucolic Norman voice his father sometimes affected. "And there's a lot in pride, saving your respects, M. l'Abbé."

The wicker basket was nearly empty. From its depths Antoine took two little portraits in plush frames and gazed at them musingly. They were photographs of his maternal grandfather and his mother. The former portrait showed a handsome old man standing beside a table piled with books, on which his hand was resting; the other, a young woman with fine features and indefinite, rather gentle eyes. She was wearing an open square-cut bodice and two silky tresses fell upon a shoulder. He was so familiar with this likeness of his mother that it was thus he always pictured her, though the portrait dated from the time of Mme. Thibault's engagement, and he had never known her with her hair like that. He had been nine years old at Jacques's birth, when she had died. He could remember better his grandfather, Couturier the economist and friend of MacMahon, who had just missed being made Prefect of the Seine Department on the fall of M. Thiers, and had been for some years Dean of the Institute. Antoine had never forgotten his pleasant face, his white muslin cravats, an his razors with mother-of-pearl handles, one for every day of the week, in their sharkskin case.

He stood the two portraits on the mantelpiece, amongst his specimens of stones and fossils.

The room was rapidly undergoing a complete transformation. Th miscellaneous objects and papers littering his desk had still to be ax ranged. He set about it with a will and, when everything was in place, surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction. As for my clothes and linen, he decided lazily, that's old Mother Friihling's affair. To make his escape from Mademoiselle's leading-strings still more complete, he had arranged for the concierge to do all the work in the ground-floor flat, without help or interference from above. Lighting a cigarette, he settled luxuriously into one of the leather arm-chairs. It was seldom he had a whole evening to himself like this, without anything definite to do, and he was feeling rather lost. It was too early to go to bed and he wondered what to do with himself. Should he stay where he was, smoking cigarettes, thinking of anything, or nothing? Of course he had letters to write but—no, he didn't feel like letter-writing.

I know, he suddenly thought, rising from the chair and going to the bookcase. I meant to look up what Hemon says about infantile diabetes. Setting the fat, paper-bound volume on his knee, he began glancing through its pages. Yes, I ought to have known that; it's obvious. A frown had settled on his face. Yes, I was completely mistaken; if it hadn't been for Philip that poor child would be done for, and it would be my fault. Well, not exactly my fault. Still … He closed the book and slammed it onto the table. Curious how stiff, almost cutting, the chief can be on such occasions. Of course he's awfully vain, likes to act impressive. "My poor good Thibault," that's what he said. "My poor good Thibault, the diet you prescribed was bound to make the child get worse." Yes, he said that in front of the nurses and students; a nasty slap in the eye!

Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he took a few steps in the room. I really ought to have answered him back. I should have said: "For one thing, if you did your own duty …" Just that. He'd have said: "M. Thibault, on that score I do not see how anyone …" Then I'd have driven home my point. "Excuse me, Chief. If you came to the hospital punctually in the morning, and if you stayed until the end of the consultation hour, instead of dashing off at half-past eleven to visit your paying patients, I wouldn't have to do your work for you, and I wouldn't run the risk of making blunders." Yes! In front of them all! What a sensation! Of course he'd have been sick to death with me for a couple of weeks or so—but what the devil would that matter? Who cares?

A vindictive expression had suddenly come over his face. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he began absent-mindedly winding up the clock. He shivered, put on his coat again, and went back to his chair. His cheerfulness of a short while back had evaporated and he

felt a sudden chill at his heart. The damned fool! His lips twisted in a rancorous grin. Crossing his legs impatiently, he lit another cigarette. But even as he murmured: "Damned fool!" he had been thinking of the sureness of eye, the experience, the amazing intuition of Dr. Philip, and at that moment the genius of his chief seemed to him something almost superhuman.

What about me? he thought, and a vague distress seemed to grip his throat. Shall I ever get to understand things in a flash, as he does? Shall I ever have that almost infallible perspicacity which is what really makes the great physician? Shall I? Of course I've a good memory, I'm hard-working, persevering. But those are virtues of the underling. Have I anything more in me? It's not the first time I've boggled over an easy diagnosis—yes, there's no getting over that, it was simplicity itself, a "classical" case, with all the obvious symptoms. Suddenly he flung his arms up. Yes, it's going to be a hard struggle. I've got to work, pile up knowledge day by day. But then his face grew pale. He had remembered Jacques was coming next day. Tomorrow evening, he thought, Jacques will be in the room over there, and I …

He had jumped up. And now the project he had formed of living with his brother appeared to him in its true light, as the most irreparable of follies! He was no longer thinking of the responsibility he had undertaken, he was thinking only of the handicap that was bound from now on, whatever he might do, to retard his progress. What a fool he had been! It was he himself who had hung this millstone round his own neck. And now there was no escape.

He crossed the hall unthinkingly, opened the door of the room that had been prepared for Jacques, and stood on the threshold, unmoving, peering into the darkness. He felt profoundly discouraged. "Damn it!" he said aloud. "Is there no way of escape, no place where one can have some peace? Where one could work, and have only oneself to think about? Here one has to give in all the time—to the family, to friends, and now to Jacques! They all conspire to prevent me from working, to make a mess of my life!" The blood had gone to his head; his throat was parched. He ran to the kitchen, drank two glasses of cold water, and returned to his study.

In a mood of black depression he began to undress. All in this room, in which he had not yet got used to his surroundings, in which familiar objects seemed different from their former selves—everything in the room suddenly seemed hostile.

He took an hour to go to bed, and longer still to fall asleep. He was not accustomed to have the noises of the street so near; each passing footfall made him start. His mind was obsessed with trifles; he remembered the trouble he had had in finding a cab, coming home the other night from an evening at Philip's place. And from time to time the thought of Jacques's return came back with harrowing intensity, and he started tossing this side and that in nervous exasperation.

Furiously he adjured himself: I've my own way to make, blast it! Let them look after themselves! I shall let him live here, now that it's all fixed up, and I'll see he does the work he has to do. But there it ends. I've promised to look after him, and that's all. It must not stand in the way of my career. My career! That's the big thing!

Of his affection for the boy not a trace remained that night. Antoine recalled his visit to Crouy. He pictured his brother as he then had seen him: emaciated, with the pale cast of loneliness. Quite possibly, it struck him now, the boy was consumptive. In that case he would persuade his father to pack off Jacques to a good sanatorium, to Auvergne, to the Pyrenees, or, better still, to Switzerland; then he, Antoine, would be alone, his own master, free to work just as he pleased. He even caught himself thinking: I'd take his room and use it as my bedroom.

# VIII

ANTOINE woke up in an entirely different mood. In the course of the morning, at the hospital, he frequently consulted his watch with cheerful impatience, all eagerness to go and take over his brother from the hands of M. Faisme. He was at the station long before the train was due and, while he walked up and down the platform, busied himself memorizing what he intended to say to M. Faisme about the Foundation. But when the train came in and he saw Jacques's form and the superintendent's glasses amidst the press of passengers, he completely forgot the home-truths he had intended to rub in.

M. Faisme was all smiles, very spick and span, and accosted Antoine as if he were a bosom friend. He wore light-coloured gloves, and his yellow face, close-shaved to an immaculate smoothness, gave the impression of having been liberally powdered. He seemed little disposed to part company with the brothers and urged them to a cafe terrace for a drink. Only by promptly hailing a taxi did Antoine manage to escape. M. Faisme himself lifted Jacques's bag onto the seat, and when the cab moved off, at the risk of having the toes of his patent-leather shoes run over, he thrust his head in through the window and effusively clasped the brothers' hands, bidding Antoine meanwhile convey his profound respects to the eminent Founder.

Jacques was crying.

He had not yet said a word, or made the least response to his brother's cordial welcome. But the state of prostration the boy was evidently in increased Antoine's pity and the new gentleness stirring in his heart. Had anyone ventured to remind him of his rageful feelings of the previous night, he would have disclaimed them indignantly and affirmed in perfect good faith that he had never ceased to feel that the boy's return would give at last a point and purpose to his life, so lamentably empty and futile hitherto.

When he had led his brother into their flat and closed the door behind them, he was as pleasantly elated as a young lover doing the honours of the home he has prepared for her to his first mistress. Indeed that very idea flashed through his mind and made him laugh; perhaps he was being ridiculous, but he was feeling far too cheerful to mind that. And though in vain he tried to catch some gleam of satisfaction on his brother's face, he never doubted for a moment that he was going to make a success of the task he had undertaken.

Jacques's room had been visited at the last moment by Mademoiselle; she had lit the fire to give it a cosier air and placed well to the fore a plateful of the almond cakes dusted with vanilla sugar for which Jacques had had a special fondness in the past. On the bedside table, in a glass, was a little bunch of violets with a streamer cut out of paper attached to it, on which Gisèle had written in chalk of various colours: "For Jacquot."

But Jacques paid no heed to any of these preparations. Almost the moment he entered, while Antoine was taking off his coat, he had sat down near the door, holding his hat.

"Come along, Jacques, and have a look round our estate!" Antoine called out.

The boy went up to him lethargically, cast a listless glance into the other room, and went back to his seat. He seemed to be waiting for, and afraid of, something.

"What do you say to going up and seeing 'them' now?" Antoine suggested. And he guessed from Jacques's shiver that, with all his dread of the impending encounter, he would rather get it over as soon as possible.

"Yes? Well, let's go at once. We'll only stay a minute or two," Antoine added, to give him courage.

M. Thibault was waiting for them in his study. He was in a good humour. The sky was cloudless and spring was in the air. Moreover, that morning when he had gone to mass at the parish church, sitting in his special pew, he had had the pleasure of reminding himself that on the next Sunday there would doubtless be, sitting in that same seat, a new and eminent member of the Institute. He went up to his sons, and kissed the younger. Jacques was sobbing. M. Thibault saw in his tears proof of his remorse and good resolutions; he was more moved than he cared to show. He had the boy sit in one of the high-backed chairs on each side of the fireplace, and stalking up and down the room, his hands behind his back, puffing and blowing as was his wont, he pronounced a brief homily, affectionate yet firm, recalling the terms on which Jacques had been given the privilege of coming home again to his father's house, and bidding him show Antoine as much deference and obedience as if Antoine were his father.

An unexpected caller cut short the peroration; it was a future colleague, and M. Thibault, eager not to keep him cooling his heels in the drawing-room, dismissed his sons. Nevertheless he escorted them up to his study door and, as with one hand he drew back the curtain, placed the other on the head of the repentant boy. Jacques felt his father's hand stroking his hair and patting his neck with an indulgence so unwonted that he could not restrain his emotion and, turning, seized the thick, flabby hand to raise it to his lips. Taken by surprise, M. Thibault opened a displeased eye, and withdrew his hand with a feeling of embarrassment.

"Tch! Tch!" he muttered gruffly, jerking his neck clear of the collar several times. Jacques's sentimentality seemed to him to augur no good.

They found Mademoiselle dressing Gisèle for vespers. When Mademoiselle, instead of the little imp of mischief she was expecting, saw a tall, pale youth with haggard eyes enter the room, she wrung her hands alarmedly and the ribbon she was tying in the little girl's hair slipped from her fingers. Such was her consternation that it was some little time before she could bring herself to kiss him.

"Bless and save us, Jacques! Is it really you?" was all she managed to say; then flung her arms around him. After hugging him to her bosom, she stepped back to have another look at him, but, though her shining eyes lingered on every feature, they could find no semblance of her dear youngster's face.

Gise was still more startled by the change, and feeling so shy that she kept her eyes fixed on the carpet, she had to bite her lip to restrain herself from bursting into laughter. And Jacques's first smile of the day was for her.

"So you don't recognize me, Gise!" He went up to her and, now that the ice was broken, she threw herself into his arms and then began skipping round him like a young lamb, still clinging to his hand. But she dared not talk to him as yet, not even ask if he had seen her flowers.

They all went down together. Gisèle had not let go Jacques's hand and was nestling against him with the innocent sensuality of a young animal. At the foot of the staircase they parted hands, but in the portico as she was going out she blew him, through the glass door, a big kiss with both hands; he did not see it.

Now they were alone in their new home, Antoine's first glance at Jacques told him a weight had been lifted from the boy's mind by this meeting with the members of the family, and that he was already feeling better.

"You know, I think we'll do very well here, you and I. Nice little flat, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, sit down, Jacques, and make yourself at home. Try that chair over there, it's very comfortable, and tell me what you think of it. Now I'll make some tea. I suppose you're hungry? Go and choose us some cakes at the pastrycook's."

"Thanks. I'm not hungry."

"But *I* am!" Nothing could repress Antoine's geniality. After a laborious, solitary youth, Antoine was now experiencing for the first time the pleasure of loving and protecting someone, sharing his life with another. And for the sheer joy of it he was laughing, carried away by an exhilaration that was making him expansive as he had never been before.

"Have a cigarette then. No? You keep on looking at me… . Don't you smoke? You keep on looking at me, I was going to say, as if I was laying a trap for you. Look here, Jacques, let yourself go a bit. Have a little confidence, damn it! You're not in the reformatory now. Can't you trust me even now?"

"Of course I trust you."

"Well, then, what is it? Are you afraid I've let you down, that I've got you back on false pretences and you're not as free as you expected?"

"N-no."

"Then what's worrying you? Are you missing anything?"

"No."

"Then what is it? What's going on behind that stubborn-looking forehead of yours? Out with it!" He went up to the boy, on the point of bending over him, giving him a brotherly kiss, but he refrained. Jacques looked up at his brother with forlorn, hopeless eyes; he realized an answer was expected of him.

"Why do you ask me all those questions?" He shuddered slightly, then added in a very low voice: "What difference can it make?"

There was a short silence. Antoine was gazing at his brother, and there was such affectionate compassion in his eyes that once more Jacques felt inclined to cry.

"Yes, Jacques, just now you're like a sick man." All the gaiety had left Antoine's voice. "But, never fear, you'll get over it. Only let yourself be looked after—and loved!" he added shyly, without looking at the boy. "We don't yet know one another well. Just think, nine years between us—it was a regular abyss as long as you were a child. You were eleven when I was twenty; we couldn't have anything in common. But now it's very different… . No, I couldn't say if I had any affection for you in those days. I didn't ever think about it. You see I'm being quite frank with you. But now—well, all that, too, is changed. I'm delighted—yes, damn it—I'm thrilled to have you here with me. Life will be more pleasant, better in many ways, now that there are two of us. Don't you think so? For instance, when I'm coming back from the hospital, I'm sure to hurry now, so as to get home quickly. And I'll find you here, sitting at your desk, after a strenuous day's work. Shan't I? And in the evening we'll come down from dinner early, and each will settle down in his own study, under a lamp; but we'll leave the doors open so as to see each other and ^eel we are together. Or else, some nights, we'll have a good talk, like two old friends, and it'll be an effort to drag ourselves to bed. What's up? Why are you crying?"

He went up to Jacques, sat on the arm of his chair, and after a brief hesitation took his hand. Jacques turned away his tearful face, but returned the pressure of Antoine's hand, and for some moments clung to it feverishly with all his might.

"Oh, Antoine!" The cry seemed choking in his throat. "If you only knew all that's happened inside me, in the last year!"

He was sobbing so violently that Antoine did not dream of putting any further questions. Placing his arm round Jacques's shoulders, he pressed the boy tenderly to him. Once before, on that evening when in the darkness of the cab the barriers between them had fallen, he had experienced that thrill of vast compassion, that sensation of a sudden access of strength and will-power'—the feeling that he alone must supply the vital force for both of them. And very often since, an idea had hovered in the background of his mind, an idea which now was taking clear and definite form. Rising, he began to pace the room.

"Listen!" he began. His voice had an unusual intensity of feeling. "I don't know why I'm speaking to you of this so soon, on our first day. Anyhow, we've plenty of time to return to it. Well, this is what I've been thinking—you and I are brothers. That doesn't sound much of a discovery, does it? And yet the idea is a new one, for me, and one that deeply moves me. We're brothers! Not merely of the same blood, but springing from the same origins since the beginning of time, from the same germ-cells, the same vital impulse. We're not just any two young men, named Antoine and Jacques; we're two Thibaults, we *are* the Thibaults. Do you see what I mean? And what's so alarming in a way is that we both have in us that same vital impulse, that special Thibault temperament. Do you see? For we Thibaults are somehow different from the rest of mankind. I rather suspect we have something in us that others haven't got; just because we are Thibaults. Personally, wherever I've been, in college, medical school, or hospital, I've felt myself a man apart; I hardly like to say 'superior to the others'—though, after all, why shouldn't I? Yes, we are superior, we're equipped with an energy others don't possess. What's your opinion? Don't you agree? I know that you passed for a bit of a duffer at school, but didn't you feel it there, too, that 'urge' as they call it, which somehow gave you more—more driving force than the other boys?"

"Yes!" Jacques had stopped crying and was staring at his brother with passionate interest. His face had suddenly an expression of intelligence and maturity that made him seem ten years older.

"It's a long while now since I first noticed it," Antoine went on. "There must be some particular combination in our make-up, of pride and violence and obstinacy—I don't know how to put it. Take Father, for instance. But, of course, you don't know him very well. And it takes a different form with him. Now listen!" He drew up his chair in front of Jacques and leaned forward, his hands resting on his knees: one of M. Thibault's favourite attitudes. "What I wanted to say to you today was that this secret force is always making itself felt in my life; I don't know how to describe it, it's like a wave—one of those sudden swelling waves that buoy you up when you're swimming, and carry you in one tremendous rush a great way forward. But you must know how to turn it to good account. Nothing's impossible, nothing's even difficult, when one has that vital force; and we have it, you and I. Do you understand?

In my own case, for example—but I'm not telling you all this just to talk about myself. I want to talk about you. It's up to you now to take stock of this driving force you have in you, to analyse it and apply it rightly. If you make up your mind, you can in one stride catch up on all the time you've wasted. It's a matter of will-power. Some people simply haven't any—as I've discovered only quite recently. I've got it, and you can have it, too. All the Thibaults can have it. And that's why they can make good at anything they turn their hand to. Think of what it means, to forge ahead of others, to make one's value recognized. I tell you, it's our duty to bring this vital energy, which is our heritage, to full fruition. It's in us—in you and in me—that the Thibault stock must come to flower—the full flower of a lineage. Do you see what I mean?" Jacques's eyes had been riveted on Antoine with all but painful fixity. Antoine repeated: "Do you understand all this?"

"Yes, yes, I understand!" he all but shouted. His pale eyes were sparkling, there was an almost vicious edge to his voice, and his lips were curiously twisted. It looked as if he were furious with his brother for shattering his peace of mind by this so unexpected outburst of enthusiasm. A tremor passed through his body, then his features relaxed, and a look of profound weariness settled on his face.

"Oh, let me be!" he suddenly exclaimed, letting his forehead sink between his hands.

Antoine said nothing; he was observing his brother. How much thinner and paler he had grown, in a fortnight! The close-cropped reddish hair made still more apparent the abnormal size of his skull, the scragginess of his neck, and his protruding ears.

"By the way," he suddenly asked, point-blank, "have you turned over a new leaf?"

"In what way?" Jacques murmured, and a mist crept over the brightness of his eyes. He flushed, and, though he managed to keep up an expression of surprise, it was obviously feigned.

Antoine made no reply.

It was getting late. He looked at his watch and rose; he had his second round to make, at five. He pondered if he should tell his brother he was going to leave him alone till dinner; but, much to his surprise, Jacques seemed almost glad to see him go.

And indeed, when he was alone, he felt as if a weight had been lifted from him. He had the idea of making an inspection of the flat, but in the hall in front of the closed doors a vague anxiety came over him and he went back to his own room and shut himself in. At last he noticed the bunch of violets, and the paper streamer. All the events of the day merged together in his memory: his father's welcome, Antoine's conversation. He lay down on the sofa and began crying again, but not with despair; he was weeping above all from exhaustion, but also because of the room, and the violets, and the hand his father had laid on his head, and Antoine's solicitude, and the new life which was beginning for him. He wept because on all sides they seemed to want to love him, because henceforth people were going to take notice of him, and speak to him, and smile towards him, and he would have to respond; because his days of tranquillity were over.

# IX

TO SOFTEN the transition, Antoine had postponed Jacques's return to the lycée till October. With the help of some of his old school friends, who were about to enter the university, he had worked out a sort of review course, the object of which was the progressive re-education of the boy's intelligence. Three different tutors shared the task. They were all young, and personal friends. Under those favourable conditions, the youngster worked as and when he pleased, according to the amount of concentration he could bring to his task. And soon Antoine had the pleasure of seeing that his seclusion in the reformatory had not done so much harm to his brother's mental faculties as might have been feared; in certain respects, in fact, his mind seemed to have ripened most remarkably in solitude —so much so that after a rather slow start his progress soon became more rapid than Antoine had dared to hope. Jacques profited, without excess, by the independence he was allowed. Moreover, Antoine, though he did not say so to his father, but with the tacit approval of the Abbé Vécard, felt that no harm could be done by allowing Jacques the utmost freedom. He realized the potentialities of Jacques's mind and believed that there was everything to be gained by letting him develop in his own way, on his own lines.

During the first few days the boy felt a strong distaste for going out of the house. The bustle of the street made him feel dizzy, and Antoine had to exercise his ingenuity in devising errands that took him out into the open air. So gradually Jacques renewed acquaintance with the neighbourhood and after a while came actually to like his walks abroad. The weather kept fine and he found pleasure in walking to Notre Dame along the river bank, and strolling in the Tuileries Gardens. One day he even ventured to enter the Louvre, but he found the air stifling and dusty, and the long lines of pictures so monotonous that he soon went out, and did not return.

At meal-times he was silent; he listened to his father. In any case M. Thibault was so dictatorial and overbearing that all who were constrained to live in his vicinity took refuge in silence and composed their faces into masks of decorous attention. Mademoiselle herself, despite her beatific admiration, always hid her real face from him. M. Thibault enjoyed this deferential silence, which gave free rein to his craving to lay down the law on every topic, and was naive enough to take it for approval. His attitude to Jacques was studiously reserved, and, faithful to his promise, he never questioned him as to how he spent his time.

There was one point, however, on which M. Thibault had shown himself intractable; he had formally forbidden all intercourse with the Fontanins, and, to make assurance doubly sure, had decided that Jacques should not join the rest of the family that summer at Maisons-Laffitte, where he went every year with Mademoiselle, and where the Fontanins, too, had a little country residence on the outskirts of the forest. It was settled that Jacques should spend the summer in Paris, with Antoine.

The paternal edict against seeing the Fontanins was the subject of a momentous conversation between Antoine and his brother. Jacques's first reaction was a cry of revolt; he felt that the old injustice would never be wiped out, so long as this attitude of suspicion as regards his friend was allowed to persist. The violence of his reaction was far from displeasing Antoine; it proved to him that Jacques, the real Jacques, was being reborn. But when the first blaze of anger had passed, he set himself to reason with the boy. And he had little trouble in extracting a promise that he would not try to see Daniel. As a matter of fact, Jacques was not so set on their meeting as he seemed to be. He was still too shy and too unsociable to desire new contacts; the intimacy with his brother was enough —all the more so as Antoine took pains to live with him on a footing of simple friendship, without anything to indicate the difference in their ages, and still less the authority with which he had been invested.

One afternoon in early June, when he came home, Jacques saw a crowd gathered round the street door. Old Mme. Friihling, the concierge, had had an attack and was lying unconscious on the threshold of her room. She came to in the evening, but her right arm and leg were partly paralysed.

Some days later, when Antoine was about to leave his flat after breakfast, there was a ring at the bell. A young German-looking girl, wearing a pink blouse and black apron, was standing in the doorway. She was blushing, but there was boldness in her smile.

"I've come to do your rooms, sir. Don't you recognize me, M. Antoine? I'm Lisbeth Friihling."

She spoke with an Alsatian accent, the sing-song quality of which was still more emphasized by her childish intonation. Antoine had not forgotten the little girl who was known to all the residents in the block of flats as "old Mme. Frtihling's orphan brat," and whom, as he walked past the concierge's lodge, he often used to see playing hopscotch in the courtyard. Lisbeth explained that she had come from Strasbourg to look after her aunt and do her work for her. And forthwith the girl took up her domestic duties in the young men's flat.

She continued to come each morning, bringing their breakfast on a tray and waiting on them as they ate it. Antoine would tease her over her way of blushing in and out of season, and ask her questions about German life. She was nineteen; during the six years since she had left Mme. Friihling, she had been living with her uncle, who kept a hotel-restaurant in the vicinity of the station at Strasbourg. So long as Antoine was present, Jacques put in a word now and then. But whenever he was alone with Lisbeth in the flat he kept studiously out of her way.

All the same, on the mornings when Antoine was on duty early at the hospital, she served the breakfast in Jacques's bedroom. On these occasions he always asked her for news of her aunt, and Lisbeth did not spare him a single detail. The old lady was slowly getting better— she must be, as her appetite was steadily improving. Lisbeth had a great respect for food. She was small and plump, and the suppleness of her body bore witness to her passion for dancing and open-air games. When she laughed, she would look at Jacques without the least constraint. She had a knowing, pretty little face, with a rather short nose, young, pouting lips, china-blue eyes, and clusters of flaxen curls rippling over her forehead.

Each day Lisbeth made the talk last a little longer and gradually Jacques got over his early shyness. He listened to all she said seriously, attentively. He had a way of listening that had at all times won him confidences: the secrets of servants, of schoolmates, sometimes even of his teachers. Lisbeth talked to him more freely than to Antoine, though it was with the elder brother she behaved more childishly.

One morning, noticing that Jacques was looking up a word in his German dictionary, she dropped what little reserve she had so far kept up and asked him to show her what he was translating. It happened to be a *Lied* of Goethe's that she knew by heart and used to sing at home.

*Fliesse, fliesse, lieber Fluss!*
*Nimmer werd' ich froh… .*

German poetry, it seemed, had a way of going to her head. In a soft voice she sang to him several German love-songs, explaining the meanings of the first lines before she began. The songs she liked best were always sad ones, with a note of childish sentiment.

Were I a little swallow in the nest
I would take wing to thee!

But Schiller was her adoration. After thinking hard for a while she recited without a break one of her favourite passages, the lines in *Mary Stuart* in which the young imprisoned queen is given leave to take a few steps in the garden of the keep where she is confined, and runs across the lawns, her eyes half blinded by the sudden light, her heart aflame with youth. Jacques could not understand all the words, so she translated as she went along and, to convey the young queen's delight in that brief spell of freedom, she put such emotion into her voice that Jacques, remembering Crouy, felt profoundly thrilled. Little by little vanquishing his reserve, he began describing his own misfortunes. He was still living so much alone, and spoke so seldom, that the sound of his own voice rapidly went to his head. In his excitement he embroidered on reality and inserted in his narrative all sorts of literary reminiscences; for, during the past two months, a large share of his time and industry had gone to the perusal of the novels on Antoine's shelves. He was keenly aware, moreover, that these romantic travesties were stirring Lisbeth's emotions far more effectively than would have done the plain, unvarnished truth. And when he saw the pretty girl drying her tears, in the graceful attitude of Mignon weeping for her motherland, he felt, almost for the first time, the boundless joy of the creative artist, and such an immense gratitude to Lisbeth for the pleasure she was giving him that, with a thrill of hope, he wondered if this were not love… .

Next morning he awaited her impatiently. She guessed his feelings very likely, and had brought with her an album full of picture postcards, autographs, and dried flowers: a visual record of her young life, of all she had been and done since the age of three. Jacques plied her with questions; he liked being taken by surprise, and was surprised by everything he did not know. Lisbeth's stories of her young days were sprinkled with picturesque details that carried conviction— in fact it was impossible to question her good faith. And yet, when a blush mantled her cheeks and the singing tone of her voice grew more pronounced, somehow she gave the impression of making things up, of lying, that we get from people trying to describe their dreams.

In a flutter of pleasurable excitement she spoke to him of the winter evenings at the *Tanzschule* where the young men and girls of her quarter of the city met. Carrying a tiny violin, the dancing master would follow the couples round, marking the beat, while Madame ground out the latest Viennese waltzes on the player piano. At midnight they all settled down to a meal. Then in merry groups they flocked out into the darkness, and saw each other home from house to house, but never could bring themselves to separate, so soft was the snow underfoot, so clear the wintry sky, so keen the night-wind on their cheeks.

Sometimes non-commissioned officers from the garrison put in an appearance at their dances. One of them she named as Fredi and another Will. Lisbeth took her time before pointing out on a group photograph of men in German uniforms the big doll-like soldier whose Christian name was Will. "*Ach*," she said, dusting the photograph with her loose sleeve, "he's such a nice boy, Will, so good-hearted and sentimental!" Evidently she had been to his room, for she told Jacques a long story in which a zither, raspberries, and a bowl of junket figured. In the midst of the tale she caught herself up with a sudden little laugh, and left it unfinished. Sometimes she spoke of Will as her fiance, and sometimes as if he had passed out of her life. Jacques gathered finally that he had been transferred to a garrison in Prussia after a mysterious, rather comical incident, the memory of which set her shivering at one moment and giggling at another. It seemed that there had been a hotel bedroom at the end of a corridor where the floor squeaked—but at that point the story became quite incomprehensible. One thing seemed clear: the room in question must have been one of those in Friihling's own hotel; otherwise how could her old uncle have been able, in the middle of the night, to rise in anger from his bed, pursue the soldier into the courtyard, and throw him out into the street, in his shirt and socks? By way of explanation Lisbeth added that her uncle thought of marrying her himself, for her to keep house for him. She also informed Jacques that her uncle had a hare-lip, and smoked black cigars that smelt of soot from morn till night. And, at that, suddenly the smile left her lips and she began to cry.

Jacques was sitting at his table, with the album open before him. Lisbeth was perched on the arm of his chair and when she bent down he was conscious of the warm fragrance of her breath and felt her curls lightly brushing his ear. But his senses were not stirred. Perversion he had known, but now another world was opening up before him, a world he fancied he was discovering within himself, but actually was exhuming from an English novel he had recently perused. It was a world of chaste love, happy sentimental satisfactions, and of purity.

All through the day his imagination was busy planning out, down to the last detail, the interview of the next morning. He pictured them alone in the flat; they would, of course, have the whole morning to themselves without fear of interruption. He had made Lisbeth sit on the sofa, on his right; she bent her head forward and, standing, he gazed down, across the ringlets tumbling round her neck, on the smooth curve of her neck, and back under the loose bodice. She did not dare to raise her eyes, and he leaned over her, whispering: "I don't want you to go away again, ever again!" And then at last she raised her head, with a questioning look, and he gave her his answer, a kiss on her forehead, sealing their betrothal. "In five years I'll be twenty. Then I shall tell Papa: 'I'm a child no longer.' If they say:

'She's the concierge's niece,' I …" He made a threatening gesture.

"So now we're engaged, you and I. You're my fiancée!" The four walls of his room seemed too narrow to contain so much happiness. He went out and walked in the warm summer sunshine, dazed with ecstasy. "She's mine! Mine! My sweetheart!"

Next morning he was sleeping so soundly that he did not even hear her knock and leapt from his bed only when he heard her laugh in Antoine's room. When he went there Antoine had just finished breakfast and was about to leave. He had his hands pressed on Lisbeth's shoulders and was admonishing her in a gruff tone.

"Make no mistake about it! If you let your aunt have any more coffee, you'll have to deal with me!"

Lisbeth was laughing with that characteristic laugh of hers; she refused to believe that coffee served in the good old German manner, with plenty of milk and sugar, and gulped down piping hot, could possibly do any harm to the old woman.

Now, at last, they were alone. On the tray were some pastry twists sprinkled with aniseed; she had made them specially for him. Deferentially she watched him eat his breakfast. Jacques was vexed with himself for being so hungry. Nothing was working out according to plan, and he was at a loss to find a means of linking up reality with the scene he had planned out in fancy, down to its last detail. And, as a crowning misfortune, the bell rang.

It was a surprise visit. Old Mme. Fruhling tottered in; she was far from being fully restored to health, but she was feeling better, heaps better, and had come to say good morning to Master Jacques. After that Lisbeth had to help her aunt back to the lodge, and settle her down in her arm-chair. Time passed, and Lisbeth did not come back. Never had Jacques been able to endure the tyranny of circumstance. He stormed up and down his room, in the throes of a baffled fury that resembled the fits of rage that used to come over him in the past. Setting his jaw, he thrust his fists into his pockets. And presently he began to feel a grievance against Lisbeth.

When at last she came back, his mouth was parched and his gaze aggressive; he was so on edge from waiting that his hands were trembling. He pretended to be busy with his books. She hurried through the housework and said *au revoir*. He was still bending over his books. Sick at heart, he let her go without a word. But the moment he was alone, he flung himself back in his chair and his lips set in a smile of such undiluted bitterness that he went to the mirror to enjoy it objectively. For the twentieth time he pictured the scene he had composed in fancy: Lisbeth seated, he standing, her flaxen curls … In a rush of bitterness he placed his hand before his eyes and flung himself onto the sofa. But no tears came; all he felt was the throbbing of his nerves, a sense of baffled fury… .

When she came next day she had a downcast air and, thinking he was to blame for it, Jacques felt immediately contrite. As a matter of fact, the cause of her dejection was a disagreeable letter she had just received from Strasbourg. The hotel was full, and her uncle wanted her back. Friihling agreed to wait one more week, but no longer. She had thought of showing the letter to Jacques, but the look of timid affection on his face so touched her that she could not bring herself to say anything that would distress him. She sat down, without thinking, on the sofa, and, as chance would have it, at the exact place where, in his daydream, Jacques had intended her to sit. And now he, too, was standing beside her, just where he had meant to stand. She bent forward and he saw across a mist of flaxen ringlets the smooth curve of her back flowing away under the loosely fitting blouse. Almost mechanically he began to bend towards her, when suddenly she straightened up—a shade too soon. She looked at him with surprise, then, smiling, drew him beside her on the sofa and without the least hesitation pressed her face to Jacques's, her temple resting on his temple, her soft, warm cheek upon his cheek.

"*Chéri … Liebling!*"

He felt like swooning with the delight of it, and closed his eyes. Lisbeth's fingers, roughened at the tips by needlework, were fondling his other cheek, and now, very gently, they began to slip down underneath his collar. He felt the button come loose and a delicious tingling ran through his body. Her little hand seemed charged with electricity, as it slipped between the shirt and his skin; at last it settled upon his breast. Taking courage, Jacques moved his own hand towards her blouse, but found the way barred by a brooch. She unfastened the blouse to help him. He held his breath as he felt under his fingers the unfamiliar contact of another's flesh. She made a sudden nervous movement as if he were tickling her, and all at once he realized that the soft warmth of a little breast was nestling in his hand. Blushing, he gave her a clumsy kiss; she returned it, passionately, full on his mouth. He was disconcerted, even a little disgusted, by the clammy moisture lingering on his lips after the warm pressure of the kiss. Once more she rested her cheek on his, unmoving; the silken flutter of her eyelashes lightly brushed his temple… .

Henceforth this was their daily ritual. She would start taking off her brooch in the hall and, as she entered, pin it to the door-curtain. Then they would sit on the sofa, cheek to cheek, nestling in their bodies' warmth. Usually they were silent, but sometimes she would begin singing in a low voice a sentimental German ballad, which brought tears to their eyes; and for a while, pressing closely against each other, they would sway from side to side in rhythm with the song, mingling their breath and asking no better joys than that. When Jacques's fingers moved a little under her blouse, or if he changed the position of his head to brush Lisbeth's cheek delicately with his lips, she would gaze at him with eyes that always seemed to hold a mute appeal for gentleness, sighing: "Be loving, *chéri!*"

Once their hands had found the usual resting-place, they did not stray in quest of new delight; by an unspoken pact both young people avoided unrehearsed gestures. They had all the physical nearness they wanted in the long, insistent pressure of cheek on cheek and the fluttering of their breasts, like the ghost of a caress, under each other's hands. For Lisbeth, who often seemed in a half-dream, it was the easiest thing to keep her senses under control; at Jacques's side she was lost in a haze of poetic fancies, of ecstatic purity. As for Jacques, the need for keeping in check any more definite impulse did not make itself felt in any way. Those chaste caresses were an end in themselves, and the idea that they might be a prelude to more ardent gestures never so much as crossed his mind. If at moments the proximity of the young, warm body had a physical effect upon his senses, he was hardly conscious of it, and the thought that Lisbeth might have noticed it would have made him mortally ashamed, disgusted with himself. No gross desire ever came over him while he was with her; the gulf between his spiritual and his fleshly self was unbridgeable. The former belonged to his beloved; the latter had its sordid, solitary being in another world, the world of night, which Lisbeth never entered. If some nights, unable to go to sleep, he flung himself out of bed, pulled off his nightshirt and, standing before the glass, fell to kissing his arms, hugging himself with a sort of desperate frenzy, never on these occasions did he conjure up Lisbeth's form to join the phantom rout of his imaginings.

Meanwhile Lisbeth was only too well aware that these idyllic days were numbered: she was due to leave Paris on the following Sunday, and she had not had the courage to tell Jacques.

That Sunday, at dinner-time, Antoine, knowing his brother was upstairs with the family, went to his room, where Lisbeth was awaiting him.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, with an enigmatic smile.

She shook her head.

"And you're going away this evening, aren't you?"

"Yes."

He made a gesture of annoyance.

"But it's his fault, too," she protested. "He doesn't seem to think of it."

"You promised to 'think of it' for him."

She gazed at Antoine, despising him a little in her heart of hearts, for not understanding that, for her, Jacques was "different." Still, Antoine was good-looking, she liked his imposing manner, and could forgive him for being like the rest of men.

She had pinned her brooch to the curtain and began to undress in an absent-minded way; her thoughts were busy with the journey before her. When Antoine took her in his arms she gave a short, nervous laugh, which seemed to die away deep down in her throat. "*Liebling,*" she whispered, "be extra nice this time—it's our last evening."

Antoine was out all the rest of the evening. Towards eleven Jacques heard him enter and walk at once to his room, as quietly as he could. He was just going to bed, and did not call his brother.

As Jacques got into bed, his knee hit against something hard, a package of some sort—evidently a "surprise" intended for him. It contained some aniseed twists, covered with a sticky coating of burnt sugar and wrapped up in tinfoil, and, inside a silk handkerchief with Jacques's initials on it, a mauve envelope inscribed: "To my beloved."

She had never written to him before. That night it was as if she had come into the room and was bending over his bed. He was laughing for joy as he opened the envelope.

Dear Master Jacques,

When you read this letter I shall be far away from you …

The lines grew blurred under his eyes; a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

… I shall be far away from you. I am leaving tonight for Strasbourg by the 10:12 train, from the Gare de l'Est.

"Antoine!"

The cry was so heartrending that Antoine rushed across to his brother's room, thinking he had had an accident.

Jacques was sitting on his bed, his arms outspread, his lips parted, a look of wild entreaty in his eyes; it seemed as if he were dying and Antoine alone could save him. The letter lay on the counterpane. Antoine glanced through it without surprise; he had just seen Lisbeth off. He bent over his brother, but Jacques pushed him away.

"Don't say a word, Antoine, please. You can't understand, you can't imagine… ."

He was using the same words as Lisbeth. A look of obstinacy had settled on his face and his eyes had a dark, brooding intensity that brought to mind the boy he used to be. Suddenly his chest began to heave, his lips trembled, and, as if he were trying to take shelter from an enemy, he rolled over and burst into sobs, crushing his face against the bolster. One of his arms was hanging behind him; Antoine gripped the quivering fingers, which instantly closed round his. At a loss for words, Antoine squeezed his brother's hand affectionately, gazing at his bent back racked by sobs. Once more he was struck by the secret fires brooding beneath the crust of seeming apathy and always ready to blaze up in angry flames; and he took stock of the vanity of his educational pretensions.

Half an hour went by; Jacques's hand unclenched; he was no longer sobbing, but his breath still came in gasps. Little by little it became more regular; he was going to sleep. Antoine did not move; he could not bring himself to go. He was thinking with dismay of the boy's future. He waited another half-hour, then went out on tip-toe, leaving the door ajar.

Next morning Jacques was still asleep, or pretending to be, when Antoine left the flat.

They met, for the first time that day, upstairs, at the family table. Jacques's face was tired and drawn, with a scornful twist to the corners of his mouth; he had the expression of children who take pride in thinking themselves misunderstood. Throughout the meal he was careful not to meet Antoine's eye; he did not even want to be pitied. Antoine understood; moreover, he, too, did not particularly want to talk about Lisbeth.

Their life slipped back into its normal rut, as if nothing had happened.

# X

ONE evening, just before dinner, Antoine was surprised to find amongst his mail an envelope addressed to him and enclosing a sealed letter for his brother. The writing was unfamiliar, but as Jacques was in the room with him, he did not want to seem to hesitate.

"Here's something for you," he said at once.

Jacques darted towards him, his cheeks flushing an angry red. Antoine, seemingly absorbed in a bookseller's catalogue, handed him the envelope without looking at him. On raising his eyes he saw that Jacques had thrust the letter into his pocket, unread. Their eyes met. Jacques's were aggressive.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" he demanded. "Haven't I the right to get a letter?"

Antoine returned his brother's look without a word, turned his back on him, and left the room.

Throughout dinner he conversed with M. Thibault, studiously ignoring Jacques. As usual after dinner they went down together, but did not exchange a single word. Antoine went straight to his room. He had hardly sat down when Jacques entered without knocking, approached him with a combative air, and flung down the open letter on the table.

"Now that you've taken it on you to censor my correspondence, you'd better have a look at it!"

Antoine refolded the letter without a glance at its contents, and held it out to his brother. As Jacques did not take it, he opened his fingers and let the letter drop onto the carpet. Jacques picked it up and thrust it into his pocket.

"Got the sulks, have you?" he jeered. "Well, they're wasted on me!"

Antoine shrugged his shoulders.

"And, what's more, let me tell you I'm sick and tired of it all." Jacques's voice was shrill with anger. "I'm no longer a child, and I insist—you can't deny I have the right …" He left the phrase unfinished. Antoine's air of calm attention maddened him. "I tell you I've had enough of it!" he shouted.

"Enough of what?"

"Of everything." All the finer shades of feeling had left his face; his eyes were smouldering with rage, his ears seemed to be sticking out more than ever, and his mouth gaped. At that moment he looked a boor. His cheeks were growing scarlet. "Anyhow, this letter came here by mistake. My instructions were that I was to be written in care of general delivery. That way at least I can get my letters without interference, without having to render an account to anyone."

Antoine gazed at him steadily without answering. Silence was his trump card, he knew; moreover, it served to mask his embarrassment. Never had the boy spoken to him in that tone before.

"And, to begin with, I mean to start seeing Fontanin again, do you understand? No one shall stop me."

It came back to Antoine in a flash: that was the writing in the grey exercise-book. So Jacques had broken his promise and was writing to Fontanin. Antoine wondered if Mme. de Fontanin was in the secret. Had she authorized the clandestine correspondence?

For the first time Antoine was thinking: "Well, I suppose it's up to me to play the 'stern father'!" He remembered that not so very long ago he might have found himself adopting towards M. Thibault the very attitude Jacques was adopting towards him now. Yes, the tables had been properly turned!

"So you've been writing to Daniel?" he asked with a frown.

Jacques nodded decisively, without the least sign of contrition.

"Without telling me!"

"Well, what about it?" Jacques retorted.

Antoine's first impulse was to give the impertinent youngster a slap on the face. He clenched his fists. The way the argument was going threatened to ruin the very thing on which he set most store.

"Go away," he said in a tone of feigned discouragement. "Tonight you simply don't realize what you are saying."

"I'm saying … I'm saying that I've had enough of it!" Jacques stamped his foot. "I'm no longer a child. I insist on being allowed to see whoever I choose. I've had enough of living like this. I want to go and see Fontanin because Fontanin is my friend. That's why I wrote to him. I know what I'm doing. I've asked him to meet me, and you can tell that to—to anyone you like. I'm sick of this life, sick to death of it." He was raging about the room, his mind a chaos of rancour and revolt.

What he did not say, and what Antoine could scarcely be expected to guess, was that ever since Lisbeth had gone away, the unhappy youngster had been feeling such desolation and such heaviness of heart that he had given way to his yearning to confide this first great secret of his young existence to someone of his own age, to share with Daniel the burden that seemed crushing out his life. He had rehearsed the whole scene to himself, carried away by romantic emotion: the climax of their friendship, when he would entreat his friend to love one-half of Lisbeth, and Lisbeth to let Daniel take on himself one-half of their love.

"I've asked you to go," Antoine repeated. He feigned complete detachment and rather enjoyed the feeling of superiority it gave him. "We'll talk it over later, when you've come to your senses."

Maddened by Antoine's imperturbability, Jacques began shouting in his face. "You're a coward! You're just another monitor!" He slammed the door behind him as he went out.

Antoine rose, turned the key in the lock, and dropped into a chair. His face was white with indignation.

"The damned little fool—calling me a monitor! He'll pay for that. If he thinks he can say what he likes to me, he's mistaken. He's spoilt my evening; I shan't be able to do a stroke of work now. Yes, he'll pay for this! And to think I used to have a quiet life. What a mess I've made of things! And all for this stupid little ass. A monitor, indeed! The more one does for them … Yes, it's I who've played the fool. For his sake, here I am wasting my time, ruining my work. But now I'm through with him. I have my own life to live, exams to get through. And that little idiot shan't interfere, damn him!" Unable to keep still, he began pacing up and down the room.

Suddenly he visualized himself in Mme. de Fontanin's presence, and a look of stoical disillusionment settled upon his features. "Yes, Madame, I've done everything I possibly could. I've tried kindness and affection, and allowed him the greatest possible freedom. And look at the result! Believe me, Madame, there are some temperaments with which there's nothing to be done. Society can protect itself from them only in one way, and that's by preventing them from doing harm. It may sound pretentious calling a reformatory a 'means of social preservation,' but there's good sense behind it."

A rustling, mouse-like noise made him turn his head. A note had been pushed under the locked door.

"Please forgive me," it ran, "for calling you a monitor. I've got over my temper. Let me come back."

Antoine could not help smiling. Impulsively, in a sudden access of affection, he went to the door and opened it. Jacques was there, his arms dangling by his side. His nerves were still so much on edge that he kept his head bent and had to bite his lip to keep himself from laughing. Assuming a look of vexation and aloofness, Antoine went back to his chair.

"I've work to do." His tone was curt. "You've already made me waste time enough for one evening. What do you want now?"

Jacques raised his eyes, in which the laughter lingered, and looked his brother in the face.

"I want to see Daniel again."

There was a short silence.

"You know that Father's set against it," Antoine began. "What's more, I've taken the trouble to explain to you his reasons. Do you remember? On that day it was settled that you agreed to the arrangement and wouldn't make any attempt to get in touch with the Fontanins. I trusted you. And now, see what's happened! You've let me down; at the first pretext, you've broken our pledge. Well, all that's over now; I'll never be able to trust you again."

Jacques was sobbing.

"Please don't say that, Antoine. It isn't fair. You can't understand. I know I oughtn't to have written without telling you. But that was because there was something else I'd have been obliged to tell you— and I simply couldn't!" In a low voice he added: "Lisbeth …"

Antoine cut him short.

"That has nothing to do with it." At all costs he wanted to stave off a confession on that topic. It would have been even more embarrassing to him than to Jacques. To divert the conversation into a new channel, he went on at once: "Well, I'll agree to give you one more chance. You're going to promise me …"

"No, Antoine, I can't promise you not to see Daniel again. It's you who are going to promise me to let me see him. Listen to me, Antoine; I swear to you before God that never again will I hide anything from you. But I must see Daniel again—only I don't want to do so without your knowing. Neither does he. I'd written to him asking him to reply in care of general delivery, but he wouldn't. This is what he writes: 'Why general delivery? We have nothing to conceal. Your brother has always been on our side. So I'm addressing this letter to him, and he can give it to you.' At the end he refuses to come and meet me behind the Pantheon as I'd asked him to. Listen! 'I have told Mother about it. The simplest way will be for you to come as soon as you can and spend a Sunday at our place. My mother likes you and your brother very much, and she's told me to invite both of you.' You see what a decent chap he is. Papa has no idea of it and condemns him without knowing a thing about him. I don't feel bitter with Father; but with you, Antoine, it's not the same thing. You've met Daniel, you know what he's like, and you've seen his mother; there's no reason for you to behave like Papa. You should be pleased I have a friend like Daniel. Haven't I had my share of loneliness? Please forgive me; I don't mean that for you, you know I don't. But you must see; it isn't the same thing, Daniel and you. I'm sure you have friends of your own age, haven't you? You must know what it is to have a real friend."

Seeing the look of happiness and affection that lit up Jacques's face as he said the final word, Antoine ruefully admitted to himself that he had no real friend. And suddenly he felt an impulse to go up to his brother and put his arm round him. But there was an obduracy, a challenge in Jacques's eyes that galled his pride and gave him a desire to match his will against it, fight it down. Still, he could not help being shaken by the boy's determination.

Stretching out his legs, he began to turn the problem over in his mind. "Obviously," he mused, "I'm broad-minded enough to admit that Father's veto is absurd. That Fontanin boy can have nothing but a good influence on Jacques. Nothing could be better than the atmosphere of his home life. What's more, it might be of help to me in handling Jacques. Yes, I'm sure she would help me; as a matter of fact, she'd have a better notion of what to do than I, and she'd soon get a great influence over the boy. What a fine woman she is! The devil of it is—supposing Father heard of it! Well, well! I'm not a child. After all, it's I who've taken full responsibility for Jacques— so I've the right to decide things, in the last resort. I consider that, on the face of it, Father's veto is absurd and unjust; well, then, I'll ignore it. For one thing, it will make Jacques more attached to me. He'll think: 'Antoine isn't like Papa.' And then there's Daniel's mother… ." He saw himself standing again before Mme. de Fontanin, saw her smile as he explained: "Madame, I've made a point of bringing my brother to you myself."

He rose, took a few steps in the room, then halted in front of Jacques, who stood unmoving, summoning up all his will-power and resolved to fight down Antoine's opposition to the bitter end,

"Well, Jacques," he said, "now that you've forced my hand, I'll have to tell you what my plan has always been about it. I've always intended to override Father's opposition and let you see the Fontanins again. I'd even meant to take you there myself. What do you think of that? Only I preferred to postpone it till you were quite yourself again, anyhow till the beginning of the school term. Your letter to Daniel has precipitated matters. Very well, I'll take the responsibility on myself. Father shall know nothing about it, nor the Abbé either. We'll go there next Sunday, if you like."

He paused a moment, then continued in a tone of affectionate reproach: "I hope you realize now how greatly mistaken you have been, and how wrong not to give me credit for better feelings towards you. Surely I've told you dozens of times, Jacques, that there must be perfect frankness between us, perfect confidence—or it's the end of all we've hoped."

"Next Sunday!" Jacques stammered. This unexpected victory without a struggle had made chaos of his thoughts. He had a vague feeling that he was the dupe of some stratagem too subtle for his comprehension. Then he was ashamed of his suspicion. Antoine was really and truly his best friend. What a pity he was so dreadfully old! But—next Sunday? Why so soon? And he began to wonder if he were really so anxious to see his friend again.

# XI

ON THAT Sunday afternoon Daniel was seated beside his mother, sketching, when the little dog started barking. The bell had rung. Mme. de Fontanin put down her book.

"I'll go, Mother," Daniel said, when he saw her beginning to move towards the door. Lack of money had constrained her to dismiss first the maid, then, a month ago, the cook; Nicole and Jenny were helping with the housework.

Mme. de Fontanin had been listening to hear who the caller was; she recognized Pastor Gregory's voice and, smiling, went out into the hall to greet him. She found him holding Daniel by the shoulders and, as he peered into the boy's face, emitting his raucous laugh.

"What do you mean by it, boy, staying indoors on a fine day like this? You should be out taking some exercise. Oh, these Frenchmen, they don't know what sport is—cricket, boating, and the rest of it." The brilliance of his small black eyes, which seemed to have no whites, the pupils filling the entire space between the eyelids, was so overpowering at close quarters that Daniel turned away with an uneasy smile.

"Don't scold him," Mme. de Fontanin said; "he's expecting a friend to call. It's the Thibaults, you know."

Screwing up his face, the pastor groped amongst his memories, then suddenly began rubbing his dry hands together with such demoniac vigour that they seemed to crackle with electric sparks, while his lips parted in an eerie, soundless laugh.

"I've got it!" he said at last. "It's that bearded doctor man. A nice, decent young chap. Do you remember how flabbergasted he looked when he came and found our dear little girl risen from the dead? He wanted to test the resurrection with his thermometer. Poor fellow! By the way, where is she? Is she, too, shut up in her room on this lovely day?"

"No, you needn't trouble about her; Jenny's out with her cousin. They hurried through lunch and went out at once. They're trying a new camera which Jenny was given for her birthday."

Daniel, who had brought a chair for the pastor, raised his head and looked at his mother, whose voice had shaken a little as she spoke.

"What about this Nicole girl?" Gregory asked as he sat down. "Any news?"

Mme. de Fontanin shook her head. She did not want to discuss it in front of her son, who, at the mention of Nicole, had cast a furtive glance at the pastor.

"Now, my boy, tell me," the latter asked abruptly, turning to Daniel, "what about your bearded doctor friend? What time exactly is he going to come and inflict himself on us?"

"I'm not sure. About three, I expect."

Gregory sat up, so as to extract from his clerical waistcoat a silver watch as big as a saucer. "Very well. You've exactly an hour, lazybones. Off with your coat and start out at once for a good quick sprint round the Luxembourg Gardens-—in record time, mind you! Off you go!

Daniel exchanged a glance with his mother before rising.

"All right, I'll leave you to yourselves," he said mischievously.

"Cunning little rascal!" Gregory shook his fist playfully at him.

But once he was left alone with Mme. de Fontanin, a glow of kindliness lit up the dry, sallow face, and his eyes grew tender.

"And now," he said, "the time has come when I want to speak to your heart, my dear, and to your heart alone." For a few moments he seemed abstracted from his surroundings, as if in prayer. Then with a nervous gesture he ran his fingers through his straggly black hair, pulled a chair towards him, and sat astride it. "I've seen him." He watched the colour ebbing from Mme. de Fontanin's face. "He asked me to come and see you. He is repentant, and I can't tell you how unhappy." Gregory kept his eyes fixed on hers as if he hoped the joy that glowed in them persistently might alleviate the distress he was imposing on her.

"So he's in Paris?" she murmured, without thinking of what she was saying, for she knew Jerome had come in person, on Jenny's birthday, two days before, to leave the camera with the concierge. Wherever he might be, never had he forgotten the birthday of any member of the family. "So you've seen him?" She spoke in a faraway voice and her face betrayed as yet no definite emotion. For months she had been thinking about him incessantly, but in so vague a manner that, now he was being spoken about, a curious lethargy had crept over her mind.

"Yes, he's so unhappy," the pastor repeated with insistence, "and overwhelmed with remorse. That wretched creature of his is still singing at the theatre, and he is thoroughly disgusted with it all; he wants never to see her again. He says life is impossible for him apart from his wife and children—and I believe he means it. He begs your forgiveness and will make any undertaking you desire, if only he can remain your husband. He implores you to abandon your intention of divorcing him. And I discerned on his face the look of the just man, of one who is fighting the good fight."

She said nothing, but gazed pensively into the middle distance. There was a gentleness about her face, the soft, sensitive lips, full cheeks, and rather heavy chin, that seemed instinct with compassion; and Gregory thought she was in a forgiving mood.

"He tells me you are going to appear, both of you, before the judges," he continued, "for the preliminary attempt at reconciliation and that only if that fails, the actual divorce proceedings will begin. So he now craves your forgiveness, for he has undergone a change of heart; I'm convinced of it. He says he is not the man he seems to be, that he's better at heart than we imagine. And that, too, I believe. And he's quite decided to work now, if he can find work. So, if only you'll consent, he will live here with you; he'll choose the better path, and atone for his misdeeds."

He saw her lips trembling, a nervous tremor convulsing her chin. Then, with a quick, decisive jerk of her shoulders, she turned to him.

"No!"

Her voice was clear, emphatic, and in her gaze there was a sombre dignity, giving the impression that her mind was made up irrevocably. Gregory leaned back and closed his eyes; for a long while he did not speak.

When at last he spoke his voice was remote; all the warmth had gone out of it. "Look here!" he began. "I'm going to tell you a story, if you'll let me, a story that is new to you. It's about a man who was in love. I ask you: listen well. This man, while he was still quite young, was engaged to a poor girl who was so good and beautiful, so truly beloved of God, that he too loved her." His eyes grew dark, intense. "Yes, he loved her with his whole soul… ." For a moment he seemed to have lost the thread; with an effort he continued, speaking more quickly: "And then, after their marriage, this is how things went. One day the man discovered that his wife did not love him only; she loved another man, their friend, who was welcome at their house and like a brother to them both. The unhappy husband took his wife away on a long journey, to help her to forget; and then he came to understand that now she would always love that other man, their friend, and himself no more. Thus life became a hell for both of them. He saw his wife suffering adultery in her body, then in her heart, and at last even in her soul, for she was becoming unjust and wicked. Yes," he continued in a slow, sad voice, "they came to a terrible pass, those two poor people; she growing evil because of thwarted love, and he too growing evil because the Negative was rooted in their lives. Well, what did he do then, that man? He prayed. And he thought: 'I love this woman, and I must shield her soul from evil.' And then, with joy in his heart, he summoned his wife and his friend into his study and, setting before them the New Testament, he said: 'In the sight of God I solemnly declare that you twain are joined in holy wedlock.' All three were weeping. But then he said: 'Have no fears; I am leaving you and never shall I return to spoil your happiness.' "

Screening his eyes with his hand, Gregory added in a low voice:

"Ah, my dear, what a noble reward God made that man, in the memory of that great sacrifice, his love-offering!" He raised his head. "And the man did as he had said; he gave away all his money to them, for he had great riches and she was the poorest of the poor. He made a long journey, to the other side of the world, and I know that now, seventeen years later, he is still quite alone and all but penniless, earning his daily bread as I do, as a humble worker for the Christian Healers."

Mme. de Fontanin gazed at him, deeply moved.

"But wait!" His voice grew suddenly shrill, excited. "Let me tell you now the end of the story." His features were working with emotion, his arms were resting on the back of the chair on which he sat astride, with the emaciated fingers feverishly interlocked. "That poor man thought he was bequeathing happiness to those two people, and taking away with him all the evil that had marred their lives. But God moves in a mysterious way and it was of them that Evil took possession. They mocked at him. They betrayed the Spirit. They accepted his sacrifice with crocodile tears, but in their hearts they scoffed. They told lies about him to their mutual friends. They showed his letters round. They even used against him his act of generosity, calling it 'connivance,' and went so far as to say he had left his wife without a penny, deserted her to run away to another woman's arms, in Europe. Yes, they said all that. And they brought a judgment of divorce against him."

He dropped his eyes for a moment, and an odd noise that sounded almost like a chuckle came from his throat. Then he rose and very carefully put back his chair in the place from which he had taken it. All signs of grief had left his face.

"Well," he said, bending over the motionless form of Mme. de Fontanin, "such is love, and so incumbent on us is forgiveness that if at this very instant that dear, faithless woman appeared beside me, saying: 'James, I have come back to live again under your roof. You shall be once more my abject slave, and when I feel inclined, I'll make a mock of you again'—well, even if she said all that, I'd reply: 'Come, take all the little I possess. I thank God for your return. And I shall strive so ardently to be truly good in your eyes, that you, too, will become good; for Evil does not exist.' Yes, it's the truth, dear, if ever my Dolly comes back to me, asking me to give her shelter, that's how I shall deal by her. But I shan't say: 'Dolly, I forgive you,' but only:. 'Christ watch over you!' And so my words will not come back empty, because Good is the power, the only power, capable of holding in check the Negative." Folding his arms, he fell silent, nursing his pointed chin in the hollow of his hand. At last he spoke again, in the sing-song intonation of the professional preacher. "And you, Mme. de Fontanin, should go and do likewise. For you love this man with your heart's love, and Love is Righteousness. Christ has said: 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.' "

She shook her head sadly.

"You don't know him, James," she said in a low voice. "The very air's unbreatheable beside him. Everywhere he brings evil. He would only destroy all our happiness again—and contaminate the children."

"When Christ touched the leper's sore with His hand, the hand of Christ was not infected, but the leper was cleansed."

"You say I love him—no, that isn't true! I know him too well now. I know what his promises are worth. I've forgiven him far too often."

"When Peter asked Our Lord how often he should forgive his brother, saying: 'Till seven times?' Jesus answered: 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.' "

"I tell you, James, you don't know him."

"Who has the right to think: 'I know my brother'? Christ said: 'I judge no man.' And I, Gregory, I say to you: if a man leads a life of sin without being vexed and sore at heart, that is because there is still blindness in his soul. But one who weeps because he has lapsed into a sinful life, verily his eyes are open , to the light of truth. I tell you he is stricken with remorse and his face was. the face of a just man."

"You don't know everything, James. Ask him what he did when that woman had to run away to Belgium because her creditors were after her. It was another man that she ran away with, but he left all to follow them, he threw away every vestige of self-respect. For two months he worked as a ticket-taker in the theatre where she was singing. The way he behaved was simply revolting. Yes, revolting! She went on living with her violinist; Jerome put up with everything, he used to dine with them, to play duets with his mistress's lover! 'The face of a just man'! No, you've no idea what he's really like. Today he's in Paris, he's repentant, and tells you he has left that woman, and doesn't want to see her again. Tell me, why should he be paying off her debts—if it isn't that he wants to get her to come back to him? Yes, he's settling with Noémie's creditors one by one, and that's the reason why he is in Paris now. And the money he's using for it is—mine and the children's. Listen! Do you know what he did' three weeks ago? He mortgaged our place at Maisons-Laffitte, just to raise twenty-five thousand francs for one of Noémie's creditors who was pressing her for payment."

She looked down; there was more to tell, but she left it unsaid. She was recalling that meeting at the notary's to which she had been summoned and to which she had gone, suspecting nothing, to find Jerome waiting for her at the door. He needed her power of attorney for the mortgage, as the property was hers by inheritance. He had thrown himself on her mercy, professing to be penniless and on the brink of suicide; there, in the public street, he had dramatically turned out his empty pockets. She had given way almost without a struggle, and had followed him to the lawyer's office, to put an end to the scene he was making in the street—and also because she, too, was short of money and he had promised to give her a few thousand francs out of the proceeds of the mortgage. She had to have the money to tide over the next six months, pending the settlement that would take place after the divorce.

"I tell you again, James, you don't know him. He assures you that everything is changed, and he wants to come back to live with us. Supposing I tell you that the day before yesterday, when he came here to leave his birthday present for Jenny, downstairs with the concierge, he had his cab stop only a few yards from our door, and that there was someone with him in the cab!" She shuddered; a picture had risen before her of the little workgirl in black she had seen crying on a bench beside the Seine. She stood up. "That's the sort of man he is!" she cried. "He's so dead to every sense of decency that he brings with him some woman or other, his latest mistress, when he calls to leave a birthday present for his daughter. And you say I still love him—that's untrue, absolutely untrue!" She was pale with resentment; at that moment she seemed genuinely to hate him.

Gregory gazed at her severely.

"The truth is not in you," he said. "Even in thought, should we return evil for evil? Spirit is everything. The material world is subject to the spiritual. Has not Christ said—?" The barking of the dog cut him short. "That must be your damned bearded doctor man!" he muttered, scowling.

He hurried back to his chair and sat down.

The door opened and Antoine entered, followed by Jacques and Daniel.

Antoine came in with a firm, decided step, now that he had accepted all the consequences this visit might entail. The light from the open windows fell full on his face; his hair and beard formed zones of shadow and all the sunlight seemed concentrated on the pale rectangle of his forehead, lending him an air of high intellectuality. And, though he was of medium height, at that moment he seemed tall. As Mme. de Fontanin watched him coming towards her, her instinctive liking for the young man took a new lease of life. While he was bowing and she was holding out both hands to him in affectionate welcome, he was annoyed to notice Pastor Gregory in the background. The pastor, without moving, gave him a curt nod.

Jacques, who was standing at some distance from the others, was examining with interest Mme. de Fontanin's eccentric-looking visitor, while Gregory, astride his chair, his chin propped on his folded arms, his nose as red as ever, and lips set in an uncouth, incomprehensible grin, watched the young folks good-humouredly. When Mme. de Fontanin went up to Jacques, there was such affection in her look that he suddenly recalled that evening when she had held him weeping in her arms. She, too, was remembering it, as she exclaimed: "Why, he's such a big boy now that I hardly dare to—!" and promptly kissed him, with a laugh that had in it a touch of coquetry. "But of course I'm a mamma, and you're the next thing to a brother to my Daniel." She turned to Gregory, who had just risen and was about to take his leave. "You're not going yet, James, I hope?"

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I've got to go now." He shook hands energetically with the two brothers, then went up to her.

"Just one more word," Mme. de Fontanin said, as they were leaving the room together. "Answer me quite frankly, please. After what I've told you, do you still think that Jerome should be allowed to return to live amongst us?" Her eyes were full of anxious questioning. "Weigh your answer well, James. If you say to me: 'Forgivel' I will forgive."

He was silent. His face was lit up with that look of all-enveloping compassion which is a trait of those who look on themselves as chosen vessels of the Truth. He fancied he detected something like a gleam of hope in Mme. de Fontanin's eyes. It was not that sort of forgiveness Christ desired of her. He turned away his eyes, with a disapproving snort.

Taking him by the arm, she tried to impart a note of affection to their leave-taking.

"Thank you, James, thank you. Please tell him my answer is no."

He was not listening; he was praying for her.

"May Christ reign in your heart," he murmured as he went out, without a backward glance.

When she came back, Antoine was gazing round the drawing-room, his mind full of the last occasion when he had seen it. She had to make an effort to steady her ruffled nerves.

"How nice of you to have come with your brother!" Her voice sounded a little artificial, exaggerating the pleasure she genuinely felt at seeing him again. "Do sit down." She motioned Antoine to the chair beside hers. "Today we'll do better not to count on the young people's company."

While she was speaking, Daniel had slipped his arm through Jacques's and was taking him off to his own room. They were of the same height now. Daniel had not expected to find his friend so changed. His affection was all the stronger, and his desire to confide in him more urgent. No sooner were they alone than his face grew animated and took on an air of mystery.

"Look here, you'd better know at once—you'll be seeing her presently. She's a cousin of mine, who's living with us. She's absolutely ravishing!" He stopped abruptly, whether it was he noticed a hint of embarrassment in Jacques's attitude, or a belated scruple checked his revelations. "But let's hear about you, Jacques," he went on with a friendly smile. Even with his most intimate friend Daniel maintained a slightly ceremonious courtesy. "Why, it's ages, a whole year, since we saw each other." Jacques made no remark, so he went on: "Oh, there's nothing as yet," and added, bending confidentially towards his friend: "But I've high hopes!"

The insistence of his gaze and the tone in which he spoke were making Jacques feel ill at ease. And then it dawned on him that Daniel was not quite the same as before, though he could not have said exactly where the difference lay. Perhaps the oval face had lengthened out a little, but the features looked much the same; the upper lip formed still the same Cupid's bow, but now its curves were emphasized by the dark line of a moustache, and he had still the trick of smiling with one side only of his face—which marred its symmetry, showing on the left side of his mouth the white flash of his upper teeth. Something perhaps of their former purity had gone out of his eyes, and the tendency of the eyebrows to lift towards the temples was more pronounced, giving an almost feline charm to his gaze. In his voice, too, and manner were traces of a nonchalance which formerly he would not have ventured to display.

Jacques was so busy observing Daniel that he did not think of answering. Then—was it because of that casual manner of his friend, which at once irritated and attracted him?—he suddenly felt a rush of the passionate affection of his schooldays coming over

him, and tears rose to his eyes.

"Think of it!" Daniel was exclaiming. "A whole year! Lots of things must have happened to you. Tell me all about them." He had been moving restlessly about the room; now he sat down, so as to fix his attention on his friend.

Daniel's attitude conveyed the sincerest affection, but Jacques thought he discerned in it a conscious effort, and became tongue-tied. Still, feeling he must speak, he began telling about the time he had spent in the reformatory. Once again, without actually intending to do so, he dropped into the same literary clichés that he had tried on Lisbeth; a sort of bashfulness prevented him from giving a bald, unvarnished account of the life he had led there.

"But why did you write to me so seldom?"

Jacques shirked the real reason: his reluctance to expose his father to hostile criticism—which, incidentally, did not prevent him, deep within his heart, from totally disapproving of M. Thibault.

"Being all alone like that changes one, you know," he explained after a pause. The mere fact of recalling it had made his face go apathetic, blank. "You come to feel that nothing really matters. And there's a sort of formless fear that never leaves you. You do things, but without thinking. After a while you hardly know who you are, you hardly know, even, if you exist. In the long run that life would kill one, or else drive one mad." He was staring into vacancy, a bemused look on his face. He shuddered slightly; then, changing his tone, fell to describing Antoine's visit to Crouy.

Daniel listened without interrupting. But once he saw that Jacques's narrative was coming to an end, his face lit up again.

"Why, I've not even told you her name!" he exclaimed. "It's Nicole. Like it?"

"Very much," Jacques said. For the first time he began to think of the charms of such a name as Lisbeth.

"Nicole! It suits her to a T. That's my idea anyhow. Well, you'll be seeing for yourself. She's not pretty-pretty, so to speak. But more than pretty; vivid, full of life, and such eyes!" He paused. "Appetizing, if you see what I mean."

Jacques would not meet his gaze. He, too, would have liked to open his heart to Daniel, tell him of his love; that, indeed, was why he had come here. But, from Daniel's first remark on, he had been feeling ill at ease, and now he listened with downcast eyes, with a sense of constraint, almost of shame.

"This morning," Daniel went on—he could hardly keep his exultation within bounds—"Mother and Jenny went out early, so we had our tea by ourselves, Nicole and I. We were alone in the flat. She hadn't dressed yet. It was simply wonderful! I followed her into Jenny's room; that's where she sleeps. A young girl's bedroom, there's something about it—! Well, I caught her in my arms, just for a second. She struggled, but she was laughing. You've no idea how supple she is. Then she ran out and shut herself in Mother's room, and wouldn't open the door. I can't think why I'm telling you all this—it's' too silly for words, really." He tried to smile, but his lips stayed tense.

"Do you want to marry her?" Jacques asked.

"To marry her?"

Jacques felt suddenly hurt, as if he had been insulted. Every minute his friend was growing more and more of a stranger to him. And he felt his heart turn to ice when he saw the expression of Daniel's face—a look of faintly mocking curiosity.

"But what about you?" Daniel asked, coming closer. "In your letter you told me that you, too …?" He left the phrase unfinished.

But, without looking up, Jacques shook his head, as if to say: "No, that's all over; you shan't hear a word from me." In any case, without waiting for an answer, Daniel had just got up. A sound of young voices came to their ears.

"You must tell me about it later on. They've just come. Hurry up!" He glanced at a mirror, threw up his head, and hurried out into the corridor.

"Well, children," Mme. de Fontanin was calling, "aren't you coming for tea?"

The tea was laid in the dining-room.

As Jacques crossed the threshold his heart beat faster; two girls were standing by the table. They had their hats and gloves still on, and their cheeks were glowing after their walk. Jenny ran up to Daniel and clung to his arm. Seeming to ignore her, he steered Jacques in the direction of Nicole, and introduced him with a breezy unself-consciousness that impressed the boy. He was aware of Nicole's eyes giving him a curious, fleeting glance, of Jenny's lingering on him with more attention. He looked back towards Mme. de Fontanin, who was standing beside Antoine at the drawing-room door, evidently concluding a remark.

"… to get children to understand," she was saying with a melancholy smile, "that there is nothing more precious than life, and that it is so terribly short."

It was long since Jacques had found himself amongst people he did not know, but he was so keenly interested in observing them that he lost all shyness. Nicole's natural elegance and sparkle were such that, beside her, Jenny struck him as insignificant and almost plain. Just then Nicole was talking to Daniel; she was laughing. Jacques could not hear what they were talking about, but he could see her eyebrows lifting in merriment or wonder. Her grey-blue eyes, if rather shallow, set too far apart, and perhaps a shade too round, made up for these defects by their gaiety and brilliance, which gave the pale, fair features a vitality that seemed unquenchable. And her face, moulded on generous lines, was crowned by a thick, heavy plait of hair tightly coiled above her head. She had a way of holding herself slightly bending forward that gave her an air of always making haste to greet a friend, and lavishing on all who crossed her path the thoughtless vivacity of her smile. As he watched her, Jacques found himself reluctantly applying to her that word "appetizing," which had so profoundly shocked him on Daniel's lips. Just then she realized she was being looked at, exaggerated her spontaneity, and promptly lost it.

It never crossed Jacques's mind to make an effort to conceal the interest other people inspired in him; on such occasions he had the ingenuousness of the child who stares open-mouthed—his face grew rigid, his gaze inert. Formerly, before his return from Crouy, he had not been thus, but used to treat those with whom he came in contact with such indifference that he never recognized anyone. Now, wherever he was, in crowded shop or street, his eyes observed the passers-by. He did not consciously analyse what he discovered in them; his mind worked on them unknowingly. It was enough for him to catch a glimpse of some peculiarity in a face, or in the demeanour of another, for his imagination to attribute to these strangers whom chance had brought his way a host of special traits of character.

Mme. de Fontanin cut short his musings; she had placed her hand on his arm.

"Come and have your tea beside me," she said. "I want you to pay me a little visit now." She handed him a cup and plate. "I'm so glad you've come to see us… . Jenny, my pet, please bring the cake… . Your brother's been telling me about the life you lead in your little flat. I'm so happy about it. It's so pleasant when two brothers understand each other like bosom friends, isn't it? Daniel and Jenny, too, get on very well together, and it's one of my greatest joys. Ah, that makes you smile, my big boy!" She had turned to Daniel, who was coming up with Antoine. "He's always poking fun at his old Mamma! Now, as a punishment, you shall kiss me, in front of everybody."

Daniel laughed, with perhaps a shade of embarrassment, but bent down and touched his mother's forehead lightly with his lips. There was an easy elegance in his least movement.

From the other side of the table Jenny was watching the scene with a smile the charm of which delighted Antoine. Carried away once more by her feelings, she went up to Daniel and linked her arm in his. "There's another," Antoine thought, "who gives more than she gets." When he had seen her for the first time, his interest had been quickened by the way the childish face looked wise beyond its years. He noticed now the graceful way her shoulders moved, as the young bosom gently rose and fell under the light blouse. She was not in the least like her mother, or Daniel either, but that was not surprising, for she seemed destined for a life quite other than the normal.

Mme. de Fontanin was sipping her tea, holding the cup very near her laughing face; through a fragrant mist she was making little amiable gestures towards Jacques. The brightness and the goodness of heart that shone in her eyes seemed to diffuse a gentle glow around her, and the white hair crowned like an incongruous diadem the noticeably youthful forehead. Jacques's eyes strayed from mother to son. At that moment he loved both with such fervour that he wished with all his heart they might perceive it; for, more than most, he felt a craving not to be misunderstood. His interest in the minds of others was so keen that nothing would satisfy him but an intimate communion with their secret thoughts; almost he wished to merge his life into theirs.

Beside the window Nicole and Jenny had embarked on a discussion. Daniel went up to them and joined in. All three bent over the camera to discover whether or not another photograph could be taken on the roll.

"Do! Just to please me!" Daniel suddenly exclaimed in the warm, emotional tone which was something new with him; the gaze he cast at Nicole was at once imperious and caressing. "Yes! Just as you are now, with your hat on, and my friend Thibault beside you."

"Jacques!" he called, then added in a lower tone: "Please do—I'm awfully keen on taking you two together."

Jacques joined their group. Daniel dragged them all into the drawing-room, where the light, so he said, was better.

Antoine stayed on with Mme. de Fontanin in the dining-room. He was bringing to an end the explanation he had thought it best to give her, with the brusqueness which, to his thinking,, lent an accent of forthrightness to his manner. "And I'd have you know exactly the circumstances of this visit," he was saying. "If Father knew Jacques was here, he'd take my brother from my keeping, and all the trouble would begin again."

"Poor man," Mme. de Fontanin murmured, in a tone that made Antoine smile.

"Do you really mean you're sorry for him?" he asked.

"Yes, for having failed to win the trust of a son like you."

"It's not his fault, and it's not mine either. My father is what is usually described as an eminent and worthy man. I respect him. But there's no help for it; never, on any question, do we think—I won't say 'alike,' but even on the same lines. Never, whatever the subject we are talking about, can we manage to see it from the same angle."

"There are some who've not yet been touched by the great light."

"If it's religion you're thinking of," Antoine put in at once, "I may as well tell you Father's fanatically religious."

Mme. de Fontanin shook her head. "That's nothing new," she smiled. "Doesn't the apostle Paul tell us that it isn't those who only hearken to the Law who find favour in God's eyes, but rather those who practise it in word and deed?"

For M. Thibault, whom she thought she pitied from the bottom of her heart, she really felt an instinctive, unreasoning aversion. The taboo he had imposed on her son, her household, and herself seemed odious, unjust, and based on the least worthy motives. Not only did the grossness of M. Thibault's appearance revolt her, but she could not forgive him for mistrusting the very things she valued most: her moral standard, her Protestantism. And she felt all the more warmly towards Antoine for having overridden his father's injunction.

"What about you?" she asked with sudden apprehension. "Are you still a practising Catholic?"

When Antoine shook his head, her face lit up with a glow of pleasure.

"As a matter of fact, I kept it up for quite a long time," he began. He found that Mme. de Fontanin's company gave a fillip to his thoughts—and, still more certainly, to his tongue. She had a knack of listening with extreme attention that implied a high esteem of the person speaking to her, and always encouraged him to rise to the occasion, above his normal conversational level. "I kept up my religious observances, but I had no real piety. God was for me a sort of omniscient headmaster, whom it was best to humour by means of certain gestures and a certain line of conduct. I obeyed, but for the most part with a sense of boredom. I was a good pupil, you see, in everything; in religion like the rest. It's hard for me to say now exactly how I came to lose my faith. When I found I'd lost it—that was only four or five years ago—I'd in any case already reached a stage of scientific knowledge that left little room for religious belief. I'm a positivist, you know," he added, with a feeling of self-satisfaction; as a matter of fact he was expressing theories he made up as he went along, for so far he had had scant leisure or occasion to indulge in self-analysis.

"I don't claim," he continued, "that science explains everything, but it tells me what things are, and that's enough for me. I find the *how* of things sufficiently interesting for me to dispense with the vain quest of the *why*. Besides," he added hastily, in a lower voice, "isn't it possible that between these two types of explanation there's only a difference of degree?" He smiled, as if in self-excuse. "As for questions of morality, well, I hardly give them a thought. I hope I'm not shocking you! But you see, I love my work, I love life, I'm energetic, I like getting things done, and my experience has led me to believe that 'Get on with your job!' is a quite adequate rule of life. So far, in any case, I've never felt the slightest hesitation about what it was up to me to do."

Mme. de Fontanin made no reply. She was not in the least vexed with Antoine for being so different from herself. But in her inmost heart she gave thanks all the more fervently to God for His constant presence in her life. To this awareness of divine protection she owed the joyful, never-failing confidence that radiated from her so unmistakably and with such efficacy that, though her life had been a sequence of disaster and her lot was far worse than that of most of those she met, she yet had that peculiar gift of

being a source of courage, peace of mind, and contentment for all around her. Antoine at that moment was experiencing it; never in his father's circle had he met anyone who inspired him with such veneration, around whom the atmosphere was so exalting, by reason of its purity. And he wanted to come nearer her, even at the expense of strict veracity.

"I've always felt drawn to Protestantism," he averred, though actually he had never given it a thought till he met the Fontanins. "Your Reformation was a revolution on the religious plane, for it opened the door to ideas of spiritual freedom."

She listened to him with growing appreciation. Young, ardent, chivalrous he seemed to her just now, and she was impressed by the vital energy of his expression, the furrow on his forehead that told of concentrated thought. And when he raised his head she had a childish delight in noting a peculiarity that increased the pensiveness of his expression; the upper eyelids were so narrow that they almost vanished under the heavy brows when he opened his eyes wide; at that moment his eyelashes and his eyebrows were all but indistinguishable.

A man with a forehead like that, she was thinking, could never stoop to an ignoble act. And suddenly it struck her that Antoine was the perfect prototype of a man worthy to be loved. She was still quivering with resentment against her husband. How different would have been a life united with someone of Antoine's calibre! It was the first time she had compared another man with Jerome, the first time a definite regret had crossed her mind and she had been aware of feeling that another might have brought her happiness. It was only a fleeting impulse, strong but secret, that stirred her to the depths of her being; almost immediately she felt ashamed, and she got the better of it quickly enough. But the sense of bitterness that contrition and perhaps regret had left behind them was slower to dissipate.

Just then Jenny and Jacques came in, and their appearance effectively laid the phantoms of her troubled mind. She made a welcoming gesture and called them up to her at once, lest they should think their presence was unwanted. At the first glance she felt that something had happened between them. … It had.

Immediately after taking the photograph of Nicole and Jacques, Daniel proposed to find out forthwith whether it had been a success. That morning he had promised Jenny and his cousin to teach them how to develop, and they had made all the necessary preparations in an empty cupboard, at the end of a passage, which Daniel had formerly used as a dark-room. The space in it was so cramped that it was practically impossible for more than two to be in it at the same time. Daniel had adroitly managed to get Nicole to go in first; then, running up to Jenny, had laid a hand trembling with excitement on her shoulder and whispered:

"You stay with Jacques!"

She had cast him a shrewd, disapproving glance. Yet she had obeyed, such was her brother's influence over her, so irresistible his manner of demanding—not only in so many words but by the sheer effrontery of his gaze and the vehemence of his demeanour — that his wishes should be complied with then and there.

While the brief scene between brother and sister was in progress, Jacques had stayed in the background, examining the contents of a glass cabinet in the drawing-room. Jenny persuaded herself, as she went to join him, that he could not have noticed Daniel's manoeuvre. With a little pout she asked him:

"How about you? Do you go in for photography?"

"No."

The almost imperceptible embarrassment with which he replied made her realize that she should not have asked the question. It came back to her that he had only recently been released from some sort of institution in which he had been to all intents and purposes a prisoner. Following an association of ideas, and by way of making conversation, she put another question:

"You haven't seen Daniel for quite a long time, have you?"

Jacques lowered his eyes.

"No. Not for a very long time. Not since …! Why, it's over a year."

A shadow flitted across her face. Her second attempt had been hardly more successful than her first. He would think she was trying to remind him of the Marseille episode. So much the worse for him! She had never approved of that adventure, and in her eyes he alone was responsible for it. From the start, unconsciously, she had been disliking Jacques. When she saw him that afternoon, at tea-time, she had been unable to help recalling the injury he had done her family, and from the moment she set eyes on him had felt an unqualified repugnance. For one thing, she found him ugly, vulgar even; his big head and uncouth features, his jaw, chapped lips, protuberant ears, and red hair bunched up over his forehead—all displeased her. She could hardly forgive Daniel his attachment to such a friend, though her jealousy prompted her to be more glad than otherwise to discover that the only being who dared to contest with her the first place in her brother's heart was so unattractive.

She had taken the little dog on her lap and was stroking it absent-mindedly. Jacques was still staring at the floor; he, too, was thinking of the escapade to Marseille, of the memorable night when he first had crossed this threshold.

"Do you find him much changed?" she asked, to break the silence.

"Not at all," he said, then hastily corrected himself. "No, that's wrong; he has changed quite a lot."

His keen regard for truth impressed her, and for a moment she found him less distasteful. Perhaps Jacques was conscious of this fleeting change of mood, for he stopped thinking about Daniel. Looking at Jenny, he began to wonder what she was like. And suddenly he had a brief glimpse into her character, a revelation that he found he could not put into words, though he had guessed the nervous instability, the cross-currents of intense emotion, behind those features seemingly expressive, yet so reticent, and the eyes which, for all their animation, kept their secret. It struck him that he would like to know her better, gain access to that fast-shut heart —even, perhaps, become the friend of this young girl. And for a while his fancy toyed delightfully with the thought that he might come to love her. All his troubled past was out of mind, and now it seemed to him that never again could he be unhappy.

He let his eyes rove round the room, and linger now and then on Jenny; in his gaze there were both curiosity and a shyness which prevented him from noticing how reserved her attitude was, how much she was on the defensive. Suddenly, by an inevitable flash-back of emotion, the picture of Lisbeth rose before him—but a Lisbeth who had dwindled now into a little, insignificant domestic creature, of no account. For the first time he realized the childishness of his romantic scheme of marrying Lisbeth. But—what then? He was appalled at the void that of a sudden loomed up in his life, a void that at all costs he must fill. In Jenny, obviously, he might find the friend he needed, but …

Her voice took him from his reverie, with a start.

"… at a school?"

He caught only the tail-end of the phrase.

"Sorry! I didn't catch … What were you saying?"

"I asked if you were going to school just now."

"Not yet." His voice betrayed his discomfiture. "I'm very behindhand with my studies, you know. I'm working with private coaches, friends of my brother." Then, in all innocence, he added: "And you?"

She was offended by his putting a direct question to her and the too familiar glance that accompanied it.

"I don't go to school," she answered curtly. "I have a governess."

With his next observation he made another blunder.

"Of course, for a girl, it doesn't matter really."

She bridled.

"That's what you think. But it's not Mother's view, or Daniel's."

Now there was no mistaking her hostility. He realized too late his clumsiness and tried to retrieve the situation by a remark which he imagined amiable.

"What I mean is, a girl always knows enough to get along with."

He saw that he was sinking in deeper; he could not control his thoughts or words. That damned reformatory! It had made an idiot of him! He reddened, and the sudden rush of blood to his head seemed to complete his befuddlement. The only issue he could see now was to give vent to his anger. For a moment he groped vainly for some stinging retort; then, throwing discretion to the winds, he blurted out in the vulgar, bantering tone his father often used:

"The principal thing isn't taught in schools; it's character."

She had herself well under control, and did not flinch. But just then the dog yawned noisily and she exclaimed:

"Oh, you nasty little creature! What disgusting manners!" Her voice was trembling with rage. "What disgusting manners!" she repeated, with a shrill, rancorous insistence. Then she put the dog down, rose, and walked out onto the balcony.

Five slow minutes passed, five minutes of intolerable silence. Jacques had not moved from his chair; he felt as if he were suffocating. From the dining-room came the sound of alternating voices: Mme. de Fontanin's and Antoine's. Jenny was leaning on the balcony rail, with her back to him, humming one of her piano exercises and beating time with her foot as if to emphasize her truculent contempt. She had made up her mind to tell her brother all about it, and get him to drop this vulgar, ill-bred friend of his. At that moment she hated Jacques. Glancing furtively into the room, she saw him sitting there, flushed but on his dignity. She felt even surer of herself and set her mind to finding some new remark to hurt him.

"Come along, Puce! I'm off!"

Leaving the balcony, she walked past him as if he were not there and calmly proceeded to the dining-room.

Jacques was terrified at the thought that if he stayed behind he would never find a way of getting up and going. So he rose, and followed her at a distance. Mme. de Fontanin's affectionate welcome changed his resentment into melancholy.

"So your brother's deserted you?" she said to her daughter.

"Oh, I asked Daniel to develop my films right away," she explained, but without meeting her mother's eye. "He won't be long now."

She had a shrewd suspicion that Jacques had not been taken in; and this complicity that circumstances had forced on them intensified their mutual dislike. Inexorably Jacques wrote her down a liar, and disapproved of her readiness to shield her brother. She guessed his feelings and her pride was wounded; she carefully refrained from looking in his direction.

Smiling, Mme. de Fontanin motioned them towards the sofa.

"I see my little patient has grown famously," Antoine remarked.

Jacques said nothing, and kept his eyes bent upon the floor. He was foundering in an abyss of hopelessness; never would he recover his former self! Conscious at once of his weakness and his brutality, he felt profoundly sick at heart; every impulse had him at its mercy, he was a puppet in the hands of implacable fatality.

He heard Mme. de Fontanin asking him a question: "Are you fond of music?"

He pretended not to understand, tears were filling his eyes, and he bent quickly down, as if to tie a shoelace. He heard Antoine answering on his behalf. His ears were buzzing and he felt like death. Was Jenny looking? he wondered.

Daniel and Nicole had been together in the dark-room for more than a quarter of an hour. Daniel had shot the bolt the moment he entered, then taken the films out of the camera, and unrolled them.

"Don't meddle with the door," he said. "The least speck of light will fog the whole roll."

Nicole's first impression was one of total obscurity, but after a while she began to see what looked like incandescent shadows moving in the red glow of the lantern close beside her. Gradually they took form, and she saw two long, delicate hands, cut off at the wrists, tilting a long dish. Those two disembodied hands were all she could make out of Daniel, but there was so little space in the dark-room that she was as conscious of his every movement as if he were actually in contact with her. They held their breath, each haunted by a vivid memory of the kiss exchanged that morning in the bedroom.

"Can you see anything?" she whispered.

But he would not answer her at once; the silence had an exquisite suspense that thrilled his senses and, now that darkness was doing away with the restraints of normal life, he had turned towards her and was inhaling eagerly the perfume floating round her.

At last he brought himself to speak. "No, there's nothing yet."

Again there was silence. Then suddenly the dish on which Nicole's eyes were fixed ceased moving. The two spectral hands had left the zone of the lamplight. The moment seemed never-ending. All at once Nicole felt his arms encircling her, closely, passionately. She experienced no surprise, rather a vague sense of relief that the suspense was over. But she drew her shoulders back as far as she could, twisting and turning, to elude the lips whose impact she both dreaded and desired. At last their faces touched.-Daniel's burning forehead came in contact with something cold, slippery, and pliant; it was Nicole's hair, the long, glossy plait she wore coiled round her head. He could not help giving a start, and drawing back a little. For a moment her lips were free, and she had just time to utter a strangled cry: "Jenny!"

Roughly his hand closed her lips; then, leaning against her with the full weight of his body, he crushed her against the door. His voice came in quick gasps through his clenched teeth; there was a note almost of madness in it.

"Keep quiet! Stop! Nicole darling, dear little girl, I want—I want to tell you …"

She had almost ceased struggling and he thought she was giving way to him. She had slipped her arm behind her and was feeling for the latch. The door fell open abruptly, letting in a flood of light. He released her, and shut the door again at once. But in the sudden light she had seen his face, and it was unrecognizable, like a livid Chinese mask, with great blotches of red round the eyes that seemed to slew them up towards the temples. The pupils, shrunk to pinpoints, were expressionless, and the thin, tight lips of a few minutes past were puffy now, clumsily agape. A thought of Jerome flashed through her mind. There was hardly any likeness between Daniel and his father, yet in that harsh, revealing beam of light, it was Jerome's face she had seen!

"My congratulations!" His voice was shrill with vexation. "The whole roll's ruined."

"I'm quite ready to stay," she said composedly. "In fact I want to talk to you. Only, please unlatch the door."

"No; Jenny will come in."

After a momentary hesitation she said: "Then promise me on your honour that you won't touch me again."

He felt like flinging himself on her, gagging her with his hand, ripping up her blouse; but, at the same time, knew that he was beaten.

"All right. I promise."

"Good! Now listen to me, Daniel. I was very silly this morning; I let you go too far, much too far. But this time I say definitely no! I didn't run away from home just to get involved in this sort of thing." She spoke the last words hurriedly, to herself. Then she addressed Daniel again: "Yes, I'll trust you with my secret. I ran away from Mother's place. Oh, there's nothing really to be said against her —only that she's very unhappy … and very weak. That's all I can tell you." She paused. That face she loathed above all, Jerome's face, still hovered before her eyes; his son might bring her to the state to which Jerome had brought her mother. Alarmed by Daniel's silence, she went on hastily: "You don't understand me a bit. Of course that's my fault, really; I've not been my real self with you. With Jenny, yes. With you I've gone on in a silly way, and you've imagined all sorts of things. But, underneath, I'm not like that, not in the least. I don't want the sort of life that—that begins that way. What would have been the point of coming to live with someone like Aunt Thérèse? No! I want—you'll laugh at me, but I don't care—I want to be able later on to deserve the respect of a man who'll love me truly, for always; a man who—who takes it seriously."

"But I *do* take it seriously!" From the tone she guessed the smile of naive self-pity hovering on his lips, and knew at once that she had no more to fear from him.

"No, you don't!" She sounded almost cheerful. "And you mustn't be angry, Daniel, if I tell you straight out—you don't love me."

"Not love you? Oh, Nicole …!"

"No, it's not me you love, it's … something else. And I don't love you either. Now listen, I'm going to be quite frank; I don't think I could ever love a man like you."

"Like me?"

"I mean, a man like all the rest. It isn't that I don't want to love someone, one day. I do. But it's got to be someone, well, someone who's pure, and who'll have approached me in a very different way, and for … for other reasons. Oh, I don't know how to express it! Anyhow, a man quite different from you."

"Thanks very much!"

His desire for her was dead, and all he wanted now was to escape seeming ridiculous.

"Now then," she said, "let's make peace, and forget all about it." She began to open the door; this time he did not try to stop her. "Is it 'friends'?" she asked, holding out her hand. He made no answer. He was looking at her eyes, her cheeks, the young face that seemed proffered like a ripe fruit. He forced a smile onto his lips; his eyelashes were fluttering. She took his hand and grasped it tightly.

"Don't spoil my life as well!" she murmured in a coaxing voice, and suddenly her eyebrows took a humorous inflexion. "Isn't a roll of films quite enough damage for one day?"

Good-naturedly he laughed. She had not expected that much of him, and felt a little chagrined. Still, all in all, she was well satisfied with her victory and with the opinion he would have of her henceforward.

"Well?" Jenny asked when they appeared together in the dining-room.

"No go," Daniel said gruffly.

Jacques felt a thrill of spiteful satisfaction. Nicole's eyes twinkled as she repeated slowly, emphatically:

"Ab-so-lutely no go!"

Then she noticed that Jenny's cheeks were quivering, her eyes blurred with sudden tears, and, running up to her, she kissed her.

From the moment his friend had come into the room, Jacques had stopped thinking about himself; he could not keep his eyes off Daniel. A change had come over Daniel's features, a change that was painful to observe. It was as if the upper and lower halves of his face no longer matched; the enigmatic, troubled, almost sinister expression of his eyes was out of keeping with the smile that lifted one side of his mouth and screwed the lower portion of his face round to the left.

Their eyes met. Daniel frowned slightly and moved uneasily away.

This indication of mistrust grieved Jacques more than all the rest. All the time, from the very start, Daniel had been obscurely disappointing him; now at last he was consciously aware of it. There had not been a moment of real intimacy between them; why, he had not even been able to tell Lisbeth's name to his friend!

For a while he fancied that the cause of his distress was his disillusionment regarding Daniel. But the real reason, though he had only a vague inkling of it, was that now for the first time he was viewing his love from a critical angle and, by the same token, eliminating it from his system. Like all young people, he lived only for the present; the past lapsed so swiftly into oblivion, and thoughts of the future merely whetted his impatience. And today, the present, every moment of it, seemed to have a bitter savour; as the afternoon drew to a close, he felt more and more hopelessly depressed. When Antoine signed to him to get ready to go, he felt actually relieved.

Daniel had noticed Antoine's gesture. He went up to Jacques at once.

"You're not going yet?"

"Yes, we must."

"So soon?" Then he added in a lower tone: "But we've seen hardly anything of each other."

He, too, had got nothing but disappointment from the day. And now, to make things worse, he began to feel remorseful for the way he had treated Jacques and—what grieved him even more—their friendship.

"Please forgive me," he said suddenly, leading Jacques towards the window-recess. And there was such humility, such genuine solicitude, in his manner that Jacques, forgetting all his disappointments, felt carried away by an access of the old affection. "It's been a rotten day," Daniel continued. "Everything went wrong. When shall I see you again?" His tone grew pressing. "Look here, I've got to see you alone and have a good long talk. We've got out of touch with each other somehow. Of course, there's nothing odd in that—why, we haven't seen each other for a whole year! But we can't let that go on."

He suddenly wondered what future lay before their friendship, which so long had had nothing to thrive on except an almost mystical sentiment of loyalty, the fragility of which had just been shown to them. No, they must not let it wither. True, Jacques struck him now as rather childish; but his affection remained intact and, for all he knew, the keener for his feeling so much older than his friend.

"We're always at home on Sunday," Mme. de Fontanin was saying just then to Antoine. "We shan't leave Paris till after the school prize-day." Her eyes lit up. "Daniel has won several prizes," she said in a low voice, but with evident pride. "Wait!" she added hastily, after making sure her son had his back to her and was not listening. "Before you go, I'd like to show you my treasures." She hastened light-heartedly to her room, Antoine following, and led him to a desk. In one of the drawers, in a neat row, lay twenty laurel crowns in painted cardboard. She shut the drawer almost immediately and began laughing, a little flustered at having yielded to a sentimental impulse.

"Don't tell him," she said. "He hasn't the least idea I keep them all."

They returned in silence to the hall.

"Hallo, Jacques!" Antoine called.

"Today doesn't count," Mme. de Fontanin said, holding out both hands to Jacques and giving him a keen glance, as if she had guessed everything. "You're amongst friends here, Jacques dear, and any time you feel like coming you'll always be welcome. And your big brother, too, I needn't say," she added with a graceful gesture for Antoine.

Jacques turned round to see if Jenny was there; but she had gone off with her cousin. Bending over the little dog, he kissed its sleek, smooth forehead… .

Mme. de Fontanin went back to the dining-room to clear the table. Daniel followed her pensively, then leaned against the doorway and, without speaking, lit a cigarette. He was turning over in his mind what Nicole had told him. Why had they concealed from him the fact that his cousin had run away from home and come to them for refuge? Refuge against what?

Mme. de Fontanin was moving to and fro with the supple movements that gave her still the easy grace of a much younger woman. She was thinking of what Antoine had said, of all he had told her about himself, his studies, and his plans for the future, and about his father. "What a noble character!" she was saying to herself. "And I do like that forehead of his. It's so" —she groped for an epithet— "yes, so earnest," she added with a little thrill of pleasure.

Then she recalled the idle fancy that had crossed her mind; for an instant had not she, too, sinned in thought? Gregory's words came back to her. And all at once, for no definite reason, she felt her heart full of such abounding joy that she put down the plate she was holding so as to pass her fingers over her face and feel under her hand the imprint of that sudden ecstasy. She went up to her son and startled him from his reverie, gaily clapping her hands on his shoulders. Then she gazed deep into his eyes, kissed him, and, without a word, went quickly out of the room.

She went straight to her desk and began writing in her large, childish, rather wavering hand.

> My dear James,
>
> I have behaved too arrogantly towards you. Who of us has the right to judge another? I thank God for having enlightened me once again. Tell Jerome I will not press for a divorce. Tell him …

Through her tears the words seemed dancing on the paper.

# XII

A FEW days later Antoine was awakened by a sound of hammering on the shutters. The garbage collector had failed to get the street door opened for him, though the bell was in order—he could hear it ringing in the concierge's room—and suspected that something was wrong.

Something was wrong, indeed: old Mme. Fruhling was dead. She had had another seizure, a fatal one, in the course of the night, and had dropped dead on the floor.

Jacques came in just as the body was being laid out on the mattress. The old woman's mouth was gaping, showing some yellow teeth. What was it—something horrible—it reminded him of? Yes, that dead grey horse lying on the Toulon road. Then suddenly it Struck him very likely Lisbeth would be coming for the funeral.

Two days passed and she did not appear; it seemed she was not coming at all. Jacques caught himself thinking: so much the better! He could not make out his real feelings just now. Even after his visit to the Fontanins, he had gone on tinkering with a poem in which he glorified his heart's beloved and lamented her absence. But somehow he had no real wish to see her again.

None the less he walked past the concierge's room ten times a day, and each time glanced eagerly inside, only to turn away each time, reassured, yet dissatisfied.

On the day before the funeral, as he was coming in after dining alone in the little restaurant where he and Antoine had been having their meals since M. Thibault's departure to Maisons-Laffitte, the first thing to meet his eye was a valise in the entrance-hall, just outside the concierge's door. He felt himself trembling, his forehead damp with sweat. In the light from the candles round the bier he saw a girlish form, swathed in heavy mourning veils, kneeling beside it. He entered the room at once. The two nuns glanced round at him without interest; but Lisbeth did not turn. The night was sultry, and a warm, sickly sweet odour filled the room: the flowers on the coffin were wilting. Jacques remained standing, feeling sorry he had ventured in; the deathbed and everything connected with it had given him a sensation of discomfort that he was unable to vanquish. Lisbeth had passed out of his mind and all he wanted now was a pretext to get away. When a nun rose to snuff a candle, he slipped out of the room.

It seemed as if Lisbeth had intuitively felt his presence, or perhaps she had recognized his step, for she caught him up before he had reached the door of the flat. Hearing her step behind him, Jacques turned. For a few seconds they stood gazing at each other in a dark corner of the entrance-hall. Under the black veil her eyes were clouded with tears, and she did not see the hand he was holding out to her. He would have liked to weep in sympathy, but he was conscious of no emotion, on4y a vague boredom and a certain shyness.

A door banged on one of the upper landings. Fearing they might be caught outside his door, Jacques took out his keys. But what with his confusion and the darkness, he was unable to find the keyhole.

"Sure it's the right key?" she murmured. He was profoundly moved by the slow cadence of her voice. When at last the door was open, she hesitated. Footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs from one of the upper flats.

"Antoine's on duty at the hospital," Jacques whispered, to persuade

her. Then, without the least sign of embarrassment, she crossed the threshold.

As he shut the door and switched on the lights, he saw her walking straight to his room. When she sat down on the sofa, each of her movements reminded him exactly of the past. Through the crape veil he saw her eyes swollen with weeping; grief had perhaps taken away some of the prettiness of her features, but it had added pathos. He noticed that she had a bandaged finger. He did not dare to sit down; he could not take his mind off the bereavement that had led to her return.

"How close it is tonight!" she said. "I'm sure there's going to be a storm."

She moved a little on the sofa; and the movement seemed an invitation to him to take the place beside her, his usual place. Jacques sat down and at once, without a word, without even taking off her veil, but simply drawing it aside, she pressed her cheek against his, exactly as before. The crape veil had an odour of dye and starch, and he found the contact of her moist skin disagreeable. He felt at a loss what to do or say. When he took her hand in his she gave a little cry.

"Have you hurt yourself?"

"*Ach*, it's only a—a whitlow," she sighed.

The sigh seemed to be for all her troubles at once: her sore finger, her bereavement, and the baffled tenderness fretting her heart. Without thinking, she began unwinding the bandage. When the finger was laid bare—livid and misshapen, with the nail displaced by the abscess—Jacques felt his breath stop short and for a moment his senses reeled as if she had suddenly exposed some secret place of her body.

Meanwhile he was beginning to feel, through his clothes, the warmth of the young body touching his. She turned her china-blue eyes towards him, plaintive eyes that always seemed entreating him not to be unkind. And then he had an impulse, stronger than his repugnance, to press his lips on the disfigured finger and make it well again.

She rose and with a dejected air started winding the gauze again round her finger.

"I'll have to be going back now."

She looked so worn out that he made a suggestion.

"Oh, let me make you a cup of tea. Shall I?"

She gave him a curious look, and only afterwards smiled.

"Thank you, I'd like a nice cup of tea. I'll run across and say a little prayer; then I'll come back."

In a few minutes he had the water boiled, the tea made, and was bringing it back to his room. Lisbeth was not yet there. He sat down. Now he was all eagerness for her return. He felt his nerves on edge, but did not try to ascertain the reason. Why was she delaying like this? He could not bring himself to call to her; it would be like an affront to the dead woman. But what could be keeping

her all this time? As the minutes passed he kept on going up to the tea-pot, feeling its declining warmth. At last it was stone-cold and, having no pretext for getting up, he stayed unmoving in his chair. His eyes were smarting with staring at the lamp and, with his exasperation, he felt the fever rising in his blood.

A sudden glare of lightning between the slats of the closed shutters jarred his nerves to breaking-point. Was she never coming back? He felt half asleep, so weary of everything he would have liked to die.

There was a low rumble, a black crash. That was the tea-pot bursting. Let it burst! The tea was pouring down in rain, lashing the shutters. Lisbeth was soaked through, water was streaming down her cheeks, down the black crape, washing the colour out of it till it was snow-white, white and translucent, a bridal veil.

Jacques gave a violent start. She had just sat down beside him again, pressing her cheek to his.

"Were you asleep, Jacques dear?"

Never before had she called him by his Christian name. She had taken off her veil and, in a half-dream, he seemed to see once more the well-beloved face of the Lisbeth he had known, though now there were dark rings round her eyes and the corners of her lips were drooping. She made a gesture of weary resignation.

"Now," she said, "my uncle will marry me."

Her head was bowed, and Jacques could not see if she was crying.

There had been sadness in her voice, but acquiescence too; perhaps her regret was touched with curiosity about the new life opening before her. But Jacques was not disposed to press such speculations too far. He wanted to believe her unhappy, to revel in the thrill of pitying her. Putting his arms round her, he pressed her body against his with all his might, as if he were trying to merge them into one. Her lips found his, and passionately he gave his mouth to her mouth's kiss. Never in his life had he felt such an ecstasy of emotion. Evidently she had unfastened her blouse before coming in, for suddenly, almost without a movement on his part, the warmth of her young breast was nestling in his hand.

She shifted her position a little so that Jacques's hand could move, untrammelled, under the dress.

"Let's pray together for Mother Friihling," she murmured.

He felt no inclination to smile; almost he believed he was really praying, such was the fervour of his caresses.

Suddenly she gave a little moan, and shuffled free from his embrace. He supposed that he had hurt her finger, or else that she was about to leave him. But she only moved towards the lamp-switch; after turning off the light she came back to the sofa. Close beside his ear he heard her whisper: "*Liebling*!" and then again he felt her soft lips crushed on his, her feverish fingers on his clothes… .

Another clap of thunder woke him; rain was hissing on the cobbles in the courtyard. Lisbeth? Where was Lisbeth? All was darkness in the room. He had half a mind to get up, to go and look for her, and even made a tentative effort to rise, propping himself on his elbow; but then a flood of sleep swept over him, and he sank back amongst the cushions.

It was broad daylight when at last he opened his eyes.

First, he saw the tea-pot on the table, then his coat inexplicably sprawling on the floor. Now everything came back to him, and he got up at once. A sudden, urgent craving had come over him to take off what clothes he still had on and wash his limbs in good clean water. The cold bath seemed like a purifying rite, a baptism.

Still dripping, he began to walk about the room, throwing out his chest, testing his muscles, and patting the cool, firm skin; the odious associations of this cult of his own nakedness had been completely blotted from his memory. Reflected in a glass he saw his slim young body and for the first time since a very long while he found that he could gaze at every part of it coolly, with unruffled equanimity. Remembering certain lapses of the past, he merely shrugged his shoulders with an indulgent contempt. "All that was childish silliness!" That chapter of his life, he felt, was definitely closed; it seemed to him that certain energies, after a long spell of incomprehension and deviation from their natural course, had at last found their proper function. Though what had happened during the past twelve hours was only vaguely present in his consciousness, and though he did not even give a thought to Lisbeth, he felt light-hearted, clean, and sound in mind and body. He had not the least impression of having lit on something new; rather, it seemed to him he had recovered a long-lost equilibrium, like a convalescent who, though delighted by his return to health, finds nothing new in it.

Still naked, he moved into the hall, and held the door ajar. He fancied he could make out Lisbeth in the darkened room where the dead body lay, on her knees and swathed in the black veils she had worn the previous night. Men on ladders were festooning the street-entrance with black draperies. He remembered the funeral was fixed for nine, and dressed in eager haste, as if for a holiday. That morning every act was a delight.

He had just finished tidying his room when M. Thibault, who had made a point of returning from Maisons-Laffitte for the funeral, came to fetch him.

He walked beside his father in the cortege. He had a vague sense of almost patronizing superiority as at the church he filed in with the others, amongst all those people who did not know; and without much emotion he clasped Lisbeth's hand.

All that day the concierge's room was empty. Jacques counted the minutes, waiting for Lisbeth's return; but he would not own to himself the reason for his impatience, the desire smouldering in the background of his mood.

At four o'clock the bell rang, but when he ran to open the door, it was his Latin tutor. He had quite forgotten he had a lesson that afternoon.

He was listening to his tutor's explanations of a passage of Horace with an inattentive ear, when the bell rang again. This time it was she. From the threshold she could see the open door of Jacques's room, and the tutor's back bent over the table. For a few moments their eyes met, questioning. Jacques had no idea that she had come to say goodbye, that she was leaving by the six-o'clock train. She did not dare to speak, but a slight tremor ran through her body and her eyelids quivered. Raising her bandaged finger to her mouth, she came quite close to him and, as if she were already in the train that was to carry her away from him for ever, threw him a hasty kiss and fled. The tutor went on with the interrupted lesson: "Purpurarum usus means the same thing as purpura quâutuntur. But there's a shade of di erence. Do you feel it?" Jacques smiled as if he felt it. He was telling himself Lisbeth would be back quite soon and a picture was hovering before his eyes of Lisbeth's face in the dusk of the hall, and the raised veil, and the kiss she had seemed to snatch with her bandaged finger from her lips, to throw to him. "Go on translating," the tutor said.

## PART III
## THE BEAUTIFUL SEASON
# I

THE two brothers walked along by the Luxembourg railings. The Senate clock had just gone half-past five.

"Your nerves are on edge," Antoine observed. Jacques had been forcing the pace for some time, and his brother was growing tired of it. "Sweltering, isn't it? Looks like a storm brewing."

Jacques slowed down and took off his hat, which was pinching his temples.

"Nerves on edge? Not a bit of it. Quite the contrary. You don't believe me? Well, I'm amazed at my own calmness. Each of the last two nights I've slept like a log; so much so that, on awaking, I felt stiff all over. Cool as a cucumber, I assure you. But you shouldn't have bothered to come with me, you've such heaps of things to do. All the more so as Daniel's going to turn up. Amazing, isn't it? He came all the way from Cabourg this morning just for me. He telephoned a moment ago to know when the results would be posted. Damned thoughtful he is about things like that. Battaincourt promised to come too. So, you see, I shan't be alone." He glanced at his watch. "Well, in half an hour …"

Yes, his nerves are on edge, all right, thought Antoine. Mine too, a bit. Still, as Favery swears he's in the list … Antoine brushed aside, as in his own case he had always done, all thought of failure. Casting a paternal glance at the youngster beside him, he hummed through closed lips: *In my heart, in my heart …* What that girl Olga was singing this morning; can't get it out of my head. By Duparc, I suppose. I only hope she doesn't forget to remind Belin about tapping number seven. *In my heart tra-la-la …*

And if I've passed, Jacques mused, shall I be really, really pleased? Not so much as they, anyhow, he added to himself, thinking of Antoine and his father.

A memory flashed across his mind.

"Do you know," he said, "the last time I dined at Maisons-Laflitte—I'd just got through the orals and my nerves were in rags—when we were at the dinner-table, Father suddenly addressed me, with that special look of his, you know: 'And what shall we make of you, if you're not passed?' "

The picture faded and another memory crossed his mind. What a state I'm in this afternoon! he thought and, smiling, took his brother's arm.

"No, Antoine, there was nothing unusual about that, of course. It was next day, the following morning. Look here, I simply must tell you about it. As I had nothing to do, Father told me to attend M. Crespin's funeral in his place. Remember? And it was then that something happened—something quite inexplicable. I got there too soon and, as it was raining, I went into the church. I was thoroughly sick, you know, at having my morning spoiled like that; all the same, as you'll see, that doesn't really explain it. Well, I entered the church and sat down in an empty row, when—what do you think?—a priest came up and took the chair beside me. Mind you, there were any number of empty chairs, yet this priest deliberately planted himself next to me. He was quite young, still at the seminary, no doubt, smooth-shaven and smelling clean, of good mouth-wash—but he had disgusting black gloves and, worst of all, a huge umbrella with a black handle that reeked like a drenched dog. Don't laugh, Antoine; wait and see! I simply couldn't get that priest out of my mind. He had his nose buried in a prayerbook and I could just see his lips moving as he followed the service. So far, so good. But, at the elevation, instead of using the kneeling-desk in front of him—that, of course, I'd have understood—he knelt on the ground, prostrated himself on the bare stone slabs. I, meanwhile, remained standing. When he rose he saw me like that and caught my eye; perhaps my attitude may have struck him as provocative. Anyhow, I caught a look of pious disapproval on his face and h6 rolled his eyes upwards—it maddened me, his air of smug superiority. To such a pitch that—I can't think what possessed me to do it, it's a mystery to me yet—I drew a visiting-card from my pocket, scrawled a phrase on it, and handed it to him." (As a matter of fact, all this was make-believe; Jacques had merely fancied at the moment that he might act thus. What prompted him to lie?) "He raised his nose from his book, and hesitated; yes, I had positively to force the card into his hand. He glanced at it, stared at me in consternation, and then, slipping his hat under his arm, quickly picked up his umbrella and—ran! You'd have thought he had a lunatic at large beside him. Well, for that matter, I was pretty mad at the moment; it was all I could do to keep a hold on myself. I went away without waiting for the service to end."

"But what in the world did you write on the card?"

"Oh, yes, the card. It was so perfectly idiotic I hardly like to tell you. What I wrote was this: *I do NOT believe!* With an exclamation mark. Underlined. On a visiting-card. A monkey-trick, eh? *I do NOT believe!*" His eyes widened, staring ahead. "In the first place, can one ever affirm such a thing—positively?" He stopped speaking for a moment, to watch a smartly dressed young man in mourning who was crossing at the Médicis corner. When he spoke again his voice sounded brittle, as though he were forcing himself to an odious confession. "It's absurd. Do you know what I've been thinking of for the last minute? I was thinking, Antoine, that if you died I'd like to have a close-fitting black suit like the one that fellow there has on. I even, for an instant, longed for your death— impatiently. Now, don't you think I'll end my days in a padded cell?"

Antoine merely shrugged his shoulders.

"It mightn't be such a bad thing, perhaps," Jacques continued. "I might try to analyse myself right up to the final stage of madness. Say, that's an idea! I might write the story of a highly intelligent man who goes mad. Everything he did would be insane, yet he would act only after the most scrupulous deliberation and behave, on his own estimate, with perfect logic. Do you see? I'd install myself in the very centre of his mind, and I'd …"

Antoine kept silence. That was another pose he had essayed and it had become second nature with him. But there was such awareness in his silences that his companions' thoughts, far from being paralysed, were stimulated by them.

"Oh, if only I had the time to work, to try out my ideas!" Jacques sighed. "One exam after another! And I'm twenty already; it's ghastly!"

He lifted his hand to his neck, where the collar-edge -chafed the tip of a pimple. Another boil in the making, he mused dolefully; the iodine hasn't stopped it.

He turned to his brother again.

"Listen, Antoine! When you were twenty, you weren't childish, were you? I remember you quite well. But I'm different, I never change. Really, I feel exactly the same as I was ten years ago. Don't you agree?"

"No."

All the same, Antoine reflected, he's right about that. Consciousness of continuity; or, better, the continuity of consciousness. Like the old fellow who says: "Personally, I was very keen on leapfrog." Same feet, same hands, same old duffer. I, too, that night I had such a fright at Cotterets, that colic attack. Didn't dare leave my room. Dr. Thibault it was, yes, the doctor himself and no other—our house-physician, a first-rate man, he added complacently, as though he overheard one of his subordinates describing him.

"Am I boring you?" asked Jacques, lifting his hat to mop his forehead.

"Why do you ask?"

"That's what it looks like. You hardly answer a word, and listen to me as if I were a fever case."

"Oh, no, I don't."

If, Antoine mused, the ear-douche doesn't bring the temperature down … He was thinking of the boy they had brought to the hospital that morning, the look of agony on his face. *In my heart … In my heart tra-la-la*.

"You think I'm feeling nervous," Jacques went on. "I tell you again, you're mistaken. I may as well make a clean breast of it: there are moments when I'd almost rather hear I'd failed the entrance!"

"Why on earth—?"

"To escape."

"To escape? Escape what?"

"Everything. The whole show. You, them, the whole bunch!"

Instead of uttering the comment that rose to his lips—"You're talking nonsense"—Antoine turned to his brother and examined him thoughtfully.

"To burn my boats," Jacques continued, "and go away. Oh, if only I could go right away, all by myself, anywhere on earth! Somewhere far away, where I'd have some peace and settle down to work." Well knowing that he would never go, he yielded to his daydream with all the greater zest. He paused for a moment, then, with a wry smile, turned to his brother again.

"And there, there perhaps, but nowhere else, I might bring myself to forgive them."

Antoine stopped short.

"Still harping on that, eh?"

"On what?"

"Forgive them, you say. Forgive whom, for what? The reformatory?"

Jacques cast a hostile glance at him, shrugged his shoulders, and walked on. A lot his stay at Crouy had to do with it! But what was the good of explanations? Antoine would never understand.

And, anyhow, what did this idea of "forgiveness" amount to? Jacques himself could not explain it satisfactorily, though he was always finding himself at grips with a dilemma: to forgive or, alternatively, to cultivate his rancour. To take things as they came, get his degree, become a cogwheel in the machine; or—the other way out—to give full rein to the destructive forces that surged within him and launch himself with the full impetus of his resentment against—against what, he could hardly say; against morality, the cut and dried life, the family, society. An ancient grievance, that, and harking back to childhood; a vague awareness that none had known him for what he was, a boy who needed to be properly treated, but, time and again, everyone had failed him. Yes, he was sure of it; had escape been feasible, he would have found that peace of mind which he accused "the others" of frustrating.

"Once I got there, Antoine, I'd work."

" 'Got there.' *Where, exactly*?"

"There you are—asking me 'where?'! No, Antoine, you can't understand. You've always felt in harmony with other people. You were always satisfied with the path of life you'd chosen."

Jacques fell to summing up his grown-up brother in terms which usually he held taboo. He saw him as a diligent, contented man. He had energy, all right, but what about his brains? The brains of a zoologist. An intellect so positive and so realistic that it had found its natural field in scientific research. An intellect that based its theory of life on the one concept of activity, and with that was satisfied. And—this struck even deeper—an intellect which stripped things of their secret virtue, of all, in a word, that gave significance and beauty to the universe.

"I'm not a bit like you," he burst out passionately and, swerving a little from his brother's side, walked silently aloof along the kerb.

I'm stifled here, he mused; everything they make me do is loathsome, sickening. The tutors, my fellow-students—all alike! And the things they rave about, their favourite books! Their "great modern authors"! Oh, if only someone in the world could guess what I am, my real self—and what I'm out to do. No, no one has a notion of it, not even Daniel.

His raging mood had passed. He did not listen to Antoine's reply. To forget all that has been written up to now! he adjured himself. To get out of the rut and, looking inside oneself, say *everything*! No one's ever had the nerve to say everything, as yet. But someone might; *I* might… .

It was hard going up the Rue Soufflot incline in such a temperature, and they slackened speed. Antoine talked on; Jacques was silent. Noticing the contrast, Jacques smiled to himself. After all, he thought, I can never argue with Antoine; either I stand up to him and lose my temper, or else I dig myself in before the arguments he methodically marches up, and hold my tongue. Now, for instance. It's a sort of low cunning, really; I know that Antoine takes my silence for assent. But it's not so. Far otherwise. I stick to my guns, my ideas. I don't care if other people find them muddled; I'm sure, myself, of their soundness and I've only got to develop the knack of proving this to others—a matter of getting down to it one day, that's all. Arguments—they're easily found. But Antoine rattles on and on, never stops to wonder if there's any sense in my ideas. All the same, how lonely I feel! … And once again the desire to go away flamed up in him. Wonderful it would be to give up everything, all at once. *Rooms left behind! Wonders of setting forth*! He smiled again and, throwing a teasing glance at his brother, began to declaim:

' "Families, I hate you! Closed circles round the hearth! Fast shut doors… .' " *(NOTE: For this and for the other passages from Gide's Les Nourritures Terrestres cited in this chapter, I have used the authorized translation by Mrs. Dorothy Bussy. Translator.)*

"Who's that by?"

" 'Nathanael, look at everything as you pass by and stop nowhere …' "

"By whom?"

"Oh," Jacques exclaimed—the smile had left his lips and he was walking faster—"that comes from a book that's blamed for everything, a book in which Daniel has found every sort of excuse—far worse, a panegyric!—for his—his ruthlessness. He's got it off by heart, while I… . No"—his voice trembled—"no, I can't say I loathe it, but—don't you see, Antoine?—it's a book that burns your fingers while you read, and somehow I can never feel at ease with it, so dangerous do I think it." With grudging appreciation he repeated: " 'Rooms left behind! Wonders of setting forth!' " When, after a moment's silence, he spoke again, his voice was changed, had suddenly grown harsh, staccato. "I may talk about it—going away. But it's too late. I shall never be able to get *really* away."

"You talk about 'going away,' " Antoine replied, "as if it meant leaving home for good. And that, obviously, is easier said than done. But why not travel a bit? If you've passed the entrance exam, Father will be quite agreeable to your going away during the summer."

Jacques shook his head.

"Too late."

What did he mean by that?

"Surely you don't propose to spend the two months' holidays at Maisons-Laffitte, with only Father and Mademoiselle?"

"I do."

He made an evasive gesture and, now they had crossed the Place du Pantheon and entered the Rue d'Ulm, he pointed to the groups collecting outside the Ecole Normale. His face darkened.

"What a queer character he has!" Antoine reflected. He had often made the same observation—indulgently and with unconscious pride. Much as he hated the unforeseen, and despite Jacques's habit of constantly springing surprises on him, he was for ever trying to make his brother out. Round and about the incoherent phrases Jacques let fall, Antoine's nimble wits were busy with intellectual gymnastics which not only amused him but enabled him (so he imagined) to read the riddle of the boy's personality. Unfortunately, no sooner did Antoine see himself adding the crowning touch to his diagnosis of the boy's mind, than Jacques would utter some new remark that upset all his inferences. A fresh start had to be made, leading him more often than not towards entirely different conclusions. The result was that, for Antoine, every conversation with his brother involved a sequence of improvised and incompatible deductions, the last of which he always took to be decisive.

The grim facade of the Ecole Normale was looming above them, and Antoine, turning to Jacques, cast a long, meditative look at him. Reading between the lines, he reassured himself: you can see the youngster appreciates family life far better than he imagines.

The gate was open now, and the quadrangle crowded. At the vestibule entrance Daniel de Fontanin was talking to a blond young man.

"If it's Daniel who spots us first," Jacques murmured to himself, "that means I've passed." But Fontanin and Battaincourt turned simultaneously when Antoine hailed them.

"Not too nervous?" Daniel inquired.

"Not in the least."

(If, thought Jacques, he mentions Jenny's name, it means I've passed.)

"This quarter of an hour's suspense before the results are posted," Antoine observed, "is simply damnable."

"I wonder now!" Daniel demurred. He took a childish delight in contradicting Antoine, whom he addressed as "doctor" and whose precocious gravity amused him. "There's always a spice of pleasure in suspense."

Antoine shrugged his shoulders and turned towards his brother.

"Hear what he says? … Personally," he continued, "I've been through this sort of suspense fourteen or fifteen times, but I've never managed to get used to it. What's more, I've noticed that the fellows who put on an air of stoicism on such occasions are nearly always the second-raters, weaklings."

"The joys of hope deferred are not for everyone," Daniel oracled. When he addressed the doctor there was a glint of mockery in his eyes that softened to tenderness as they turned to Jacques.

Antoine insisted.

"I'm speaking in earnest. A strong man finds uncertainty intolerable. True courage isn't just a matter of facing events with coolness; it's going out to meet them half-way, so as to take their bearings at the earliest moment, and act accordingly. Isn't that so, Jacques?"

"No, I'm more inclined to agree with Daniel," Jacques replied, though he had not been listening. And, as Daniel went on talking to Antoine, he slipped in a leading question, aware that he was cheating destiny.

"Are your mother and sister still at Maisons-Laffitte?"

Daniel did not hear, and, in the act of dinning the thought, "I failed," into his head, Jacques realized how solid was his faith in his success. Father'll be delighted, he thought, and, smiling at the prospect, bestowed the smile on Battaincourt.

"Very decent of you to come today, Simon."

Battaincourt glanced towards him affectionately; he made no secret of his fervent cult of Daniel's friend, an adoration which sometimes irritated Jacques, since he could not respond to it with a friendship of equal warmth… .

The hubbub in the quadrangle ceased abruptly. A roll of white paper had flashed into view at one of the windows. Jacques had a vague impression of being swept off his feet, borne by a wave towards the fateful scroll.

A buzzing in his ears; then Antoine's voice:

"Passed! Third on the list!"

Warm, vibrant with life, the voice rang for a moment in his ears, but he did not grasp the meaning of the words till, looking timidly round, he saw the jubilation on his brother's face. Then, lifdng a clammy hand, he fumbled with his hat; sweat was pouring

down his forehead. Daniel and Battaincourt were edging round the crowd towards him. Daniel's eyes were on him and, scanning his friend as he approached, Jacques noticed how his raised upper lip bared his teeth, though no other feature showed the least trace of a smile.

A murmur grew, filling the place with sound; and life went on its way again. Jacques drew a deep breath, and the blood once more flowed freely through his limbs. He had a sudden vision of dangers ahead, a pitfall. "Trapped!" he murmured. Then other thoughts welled up. He seemed to live again some seconds of his Greek oral, the crucial moment when he made that slip; the tablecloth rose green before his eyes, with the examiner's thumb splayed flat on the Choephoroi, his bulging nail flaked like a shred of horn.

"Who is first?"

He did not hear the name that Battaincourt announced. I'd have been first, he thought, if I'd tumbled to *asylum, shrine. Wardens of the domestic shrine*. Then, again and again, he struggled to reconstruct the train of thoughts which had misled him to that appalling blunder.

"Wake up, doctor! Try to look pleased!"

Daniel clapped Antoine on the shoulder and Antoine deigned to smile. For that was Antoine's way; pleasure for him almost always involved a feeling of constraint, for the gravity of his demeanour precluded any show of gaiety. It was different with Daniel: his gaiety was untrammelled. He seemed to find an almost sensual pleasure in poring on the faces of his friends, his neighbours, and, above all, the women present, mothers or sisters, whose artless affection frankly betrayed itself in every accent, every gesture.

Glancing at his watch, Antoine turned to his brother.

"Well? Anything more to do here?"

Jacques gave a start.

"What? Oh, no, nothing at all!" He looked dejected; he had just realized that inadvertently—at the moment when the results were posted, most likely—he had made the pimple on his lip (which for a week past had spoilt his appearance) start bleeding again.

"Then let's be off," Antoine proposed. "I've a patient to see before dinner."

As they left the quadrangle, they saw Favery hurrying up to greet them. Fie was jubilant.

"There you are! I told you I'd heard your French composition was a fine piece of work."

Favery had left the Ecole Normale a year previously and, eschewing provincial posts, had got himself nominated to a temporary vacancy at the lycée Saint-Louis. He did coaching in his off-hours by day so that by night he might enjoy the life of Paris. Teaching did not appeal to him; his preferences went to journalism, with a secret hankering after politics.

It came to Jacques's mind that Favery was fairly intimate with the examiner in Greek, and again a picture of the green tablecloth and the examiner's finger flashed across his mind; he felt his cheeks reddening with shame. That he'd nevertheless passed had not yet dawned on him; he experienced no sense of relief, rather a mood of listlessness, with occasional bursts of rage whenever he recalled his blunder or the pimple on his lip.

Daniel and Battaincourt linked their arms in his and swung him along, to a dancing lilt, towards the Pantheon. Antoine and Favery followed behind.

"My alarm goes off at six-thirty," Favery explained, "standing in a saucer poised precariously upon a tumbler." His voice was loud, his laugh complacent. "I curse a bit, open an eye, switch on the light; then I move on the hand to seven o'clock and go to sleep again, clasping the infernal machine against my chest. Presently the house, the whole neighbourhood, is rocked by an earthquake; I damn its eyes, but disobey. I give myself till five past, then ten, then a quarter past, and, when it's two minutes over the quarter, I allow myself till twenty past—to make it a round figure. At long last I scramble out of bed. All my things are spread out ready—like a fireman's kit—on three chairs. At seven-twenty-eight I'm in the street; naturally I've had no time for breakfast or a wash. Just four minutes remain to catch my subway. At eight o'clock I'm standing at my desk and the cramming process begins. You know when I get away. I have to find time for a bath, for dressing, and looking up friends. How the devil am I to do any work?"

Antoine listened with half an ear, while his eyes roved in quest of a taxi. He turned to his brother.

"Dining with me, Jacques?"

"Jacques is having dinner with us," Daniel protested.

"No, no!" Jacques exclaimed. "I'm dining with Antoine tonight." And to himself he added with impatience: "Won't they ever leave me in peace, confound it! For one thing, I've got to put some more iodine on my boil."

Favery put in a suggestion:

"Let's all have dinner together."

"Where?"

"Any old place. How about Packmell's?"

Jacques demurred:

"No. Not tonight. I'm tired."

"Tiresome old thing!" murmured Daniel, slipping his arm in Jacques's. "Doctor, you'll join us at Packmell's, won't you?"

Antoine had secured a taxi. He turned towards them, obviously in two minds.

"What sort of a place is Packmell's?"

Favery drew a bow at a venture.

"Not by any means what *you* think… ."

Antoine looked at Daniel questioningly.

"Packmell's?" Daniel said. "Hard to classify, isn't it, Batt, old boy? Quite out of the ordinary run of cabarets. More like a well-conducted boarding-house. Certainly the bar functions from five to eight, but at eight-thirty the bar-flies flit with one accord, leaving the field to the 'regulars.' The tables are run together and we all dine off a vast and highly decorous tablecloth, with Mother Packmell in the seat of honour. A good band; pretty girls. What more can you want? So that's that. You will meet us at Packmell's?"

Antoine rarely went out at night; he led laborious days and reserved his evenings for examination work. Today, however, he did not feel in the mood for hematology. Tomorrow would be Sunday; Monday, the daily round began again. Occasionally he took a Saturday evening off and plotted out a night's amusement. Packmell's appealed to him. Pretty girls …

"Have it your own way!" His voice was studiously indifferent. "Where is it, by the way?"

"Rue Monsigny. We'll look out for you up to half-past eight."

"I'll be there long before that," said Antoine, slamming the taxi door.

Jacques made no protest; his brother's assent had changed his outlook and, moreover, he always took a secret pleasure in giving in to Daniel's caprices.

"Shall we walk there?" Battaincourt asked.

"Personally, I'm taking the subway," said Favery, stroking his chin. "I'll change in a jiffy and meet you there."

Paris was stifling in a sultry heat presaging storm, the heat-wave which so often ends July, when at each nightfall the air grows drab and dense—with dust or mist, indistinguishably.

They had a good half-hour's walk before them. Battaincourt came up to Jacques's side.

"So now you've started on the path of glory!" There was no irony in his voice.

Jacques made a petulant gesture; Daniel smiled. Though Battaincourt was five years older than himself, Daniel regarded him as a mere child, and the very quality which so irritated Jacques—his incorrigible naïveté—endeared him to Daniel. He recalled the days when they used to ask Battaincourt to recite, and the latter, planted on the hearthrug, would declaim:

> "O sleek-haired Corsican, how fair thy France
> Under the sun of Messidor …!"

The would-be Napoleonic gesture that accompanied this exordium always set them loudly laughing, but their hilarity never shook Battaincourt's simple faith.

In those days Simon de Battaincourt, a new-comer to Paris from the city in Northern France where his father, a Colonel, lived, used to wear a black, close-fitting coat, which he had had specially made to order, as being most seemly for a student at the Paris School of Divinity. The budding clergyman was at that period a frequent visitor at Mme. de Fontanin's house; she made a point of encouraging his visits, as Colonel de Battaincourt's wife had been one of her childhood friends.

"I can't stand this Latin Quarter of yours!" exclaimed the ex-divinity student, who now lived near the Etoile, wore light suits, and had quarrelled with his people over the fantastic marriage on which his heart was set. He was now employed, at a salary of four hundred francs a month, cataloguing prints in the Ludwigson Art Gallery, where Daniel had found him a post.

Raising his eyes, Jacques looked about him. His gaze fell on an ancient flower-vender squatting behind her basket of roses; he had passed her earlier in the day, when he was with Antoine, but then he had observed her with brooding eyes, aloof from all distractions of things seen. Recalling their walk together up the Rue Soufflot, he suddenly felt that he missed something, as if some familiar thing were lacking, like a ring that he had always worn. The feeling of unrest which had haunted him for the past three weeks, and, less than an hour since, weighed on his every step, had vanished, leaving behind a void that was almost pain. For the first time since the results were out, he took the measure of his success; but it left him dazed and broken, as though he had fallen from a height.

"Anyhow, you had some sea-bathing, I suppose," Battaincourt was saying to Daniel.

Jacques turned to his friend.

"Yes, by Jove!" he exclaimed, and his eyes grew tender. "To think that you came back all on my account! Had a good time down there?"

"Far better than I'd any reason to expect," Daniel replied.

Jacques smiled ruefully.

"As usual!"

The look that passed between them was the aftermath of a longstanding controversy.

Jacques's affection for Daniel had an astringent quality, far different from the easy-going friendship Daniel accorded him. "You're far more exacting where I'm concerned," Daniel once remarked, "than for yourself. You've never fallen in with the life I lead." "No," Jacques had answered, "I've nothing against your way of living; what I cannot bear is the attitude you have adopted towards life." And therein lay the source of many a quarrel in the past.

After Daniel had taken his degree, he had refused to follow any beaten track. His father was away and did not trouble about him. His mother left him free to choose his path; she respected strength of will in any form and was fortified by her mystical faith that all was for the best where her children—-and, in general, the family-were concerned. Above all she wished her son to feel free and under no obligation of earning money to better the fortunes of his family. Nevertheless, Daniel could not ignore this duty. His inability to help his mother had preyed upon his mind for two consecutive years and he had anxiously cast about for ways and means of reconciling duty to his kin with other and more urgent needs that shaped his conduct. Scruples whose complexity even Jacques was far from appreciating. The truth was that—judging by the haphazard way in which Daniel had set about learning his art, unaided, taking instinct (mere caprice, it often seemed) as his only guide, painting so little, drawing little more, sometimes shutting himself up all day with a model, only to cover half the pages of an album with outline sketches, and then not touching a pencil again for weeks on end—the truth was that few indeed would have suspected the sublime faith he felt in his talent, and in his future. A tacit self-esteem untainted by conceit: he waited for the day when, in the long process of unalterable law, all that was best in him would find a medium of expression; for he was certain of his destiny—that of a first-rate painter. When and by what path would he win to that high estate? He had no notion and, judging by his conduct, did not greatly care. "We must let life take charge," he proclaimed, and followed his precept to the letter. Not without twinges of remorse, however; but his timorous reversions to his mother's moral code had been short-lived and never restrained him effectively from following his bent. "Even when in the past two years my conscience pricked me most acutely," he once wrote to Jacques (he was eighteen at the time), "I can swear I never reached the point of being genuinely ashamed of myself. What is more, when in those hours of doubt I blamed myself for yielding to temptation, I actually felt far less angry with myself than later on, when life had taken charge again, and I recalled my puerile gestures of self-restraint and abnegation."

Soon after this letter was written, Daniel happened to share a compartment in a suburban train with another passenger (known to them thereafter as "the man in the train") who can assuredly have had no inkling of the repercussions that brief encounter was to have upon the early life of two young people.

Daniel was returning from the Versailles Park, where he had lounged away a fine October afternoon under the shadows of the trees. He jumped aboard a car just as the train was leaving. As chance would have it, the face of the elderly man sitting opposite him was not entirely unfamiliar; their paths had crossed that afternoon in the Trianon shrubberies and Daniel had observed him with some interest. He welcomed the chance of examining the man at his leisure. A near view of the traveller gave the impression of a much younger man: though his hair was white, he could be little more than fifty. A short white beard set off effectively the oval of a face whose symmetry enhanced its gentle charm. His complexion, hands, and bearing, the cut of the summer suit he wore, the exotic shade of his tie, and, above all, the clear blue gaze, vibrant with life and light, that he cast on all about him—all gave the impression of a quite young man. The book whose leaves he was turning with a practised hand was bound in flimsy leather like a guide-book, and the cover bore no title. Between Suresnes and Saint-Cloud he rose and, going into the corridor, leaned forth to contemplate the panorama of Paris, all flecked with gold under the fires of sunset. Then, drawing back, he leaned against the inner window, behind which Daniel sat. The hands that held the cryptic book were level now with Daniel's eyes, only the pane of glass intervened; plastic hands, emotional yet listless—a thinker's hands. The fingers moved, half opening the book, and on a page flattened against the glass Daniel could read a few phrases:

> Nathanael, I will teach you fervour …
> A throbbing, lawless life… .
> A harrowing existence, Nathanael, rather than tranquillity.

The book slipped aside, but not before Daniel had caught a glimpse of the title heading the page: *Les Nourritures Terrestres*.

What could this be: *Fruits of the Earth?* He visited a series of booksellers that evening, only to find that they knew nothing of the book. Would "the man in the train" keep his secret to himself? A *harrowing existence*, Daniel repeated to himself, *rather than tranquillity*. Next morning he hastened to examine all the catalogues available in the arcades of the Odeon and, a few hours later, shut himself up in his room with his new acquisition.

The whole afternoon went to its perusal and he read it at one sitting. He left the house at nightfall. Never had his mind been in such ferment, uplifted by such splendid visions. He walked on and on, taking long strides—a conqueror's progress. Night came on. He had been following the bank of the Seine and was very far from home. He dined off a roll and returned; the book lay on his table, awaiting him. Should he, or should he not …? Daniel dared not open it again. Finally he went to bed, but not to sleep. At last he capitulated and, wrapping a dressing-gown around him, slowly read the book once more, from beginning to end. He well knew that this was a momentous hour for him, that at the deepest levels of his consciousness a slow, mysterious process of gestation was at work. When with the dawn he turned, for the second time, the final page, he found that now he looked on life with new eyes.

"I have boldly laid my hands everywhere, and believed I had a right to every object of my desire… .

"Desires are profitable, and profitable the surfeiting of desires—for so they are increased."

He realized how in a flash the burden that his upbringing had laid on him—the obsession of moral standards—had been lifted; the word "sin" had changed its meaning.

"We must act without considering whether the action is right or wrong; love, without troubling whether what we love is good or evil."

Feelings to which hitherto he had yielded grudgingly, if at all, suddenly broke free and beckoned him on; in the brief period of a night the scale of moral values which from his earliest days had seemed immutable went up in flames. Next day he felt a man baptized anew. As, stage by stage, he repudiated everything he had hitherto held true beyond all question, a miracle of peace allayed the forces that, until now, had grappled with his soul.

Daniel spoke of his great discovery to none but Jacques, and to Jacques only after a long while. It was one of the bosom secrets of the friends; they diought of it as all but a religious mystery and alluded to it only in veiled terms. Nevertheless, for all Daniel's zealotry, Jacques obstinately refused to be inoculated with his friend's cult. And, in refusing to quench his thirst at this too heady spring, he saw himself making a stand against his instincts and gaining thus in strength and personal integrity. But he well knew the book gave

Daniel the *regime*, the "fruits of the earth," that suited him, and Jacques's resistance was accompanied by feelings of envy and despair.

"So you look on Ludwigson as one of nature's freaks, eh?" Battaincourt was saying.

"Ludwigson, my dear Batt—" Daniel began explaining.

Jacques shrugged his shoulders and fell back behind his friends. The Ludwigson of whom they spoke—Daniel had just come back from a short stay at his place—had earned the reputation in the various centres where he had established himself of being one of the "smoothest" art-dealers in Europe, and had been for some time past a bone of contention between Jacques and his friend. Jacques could never stomach the notion that Daniel should, directly or indirectly—even to earn his living—take part in the schemes promoted by this dealer. But no one, not even Jacques, could ever boast of having dissuaded Daniel from any venture on which his heart was set. In the case of Ludwigson, the man's intelligence and tireless activity (carried to a pitch that made insomnia a habit with him), the contempt for luxury and, up to a point, of money, too, evinced by this merchant-prince who found his life's interest in adventuring and winning, the efficiency of this big business-man whose career evoked the picture of a fiery brand, shaken by the wind, smoky yet dazzling, too—everything about the man seemed wildly interesting to Daniel. In fact it was curiosity more than necessity that led him to agree to work for this modern buccaneer.

Jacques remembered the day when Daniel first confronted Ludwigson; two races, two cultures, met face to face. He had chanced to drop in at the studio which Daniel was sharing with some friends as impecunious as himself. Ludwigson entered without knocking, and countered Daniel's indignant outburst with a smile; then brusquely, without making himself known or taking a chair, he drew a wallet from his pocket, with the gesture of a high-comedy actor tossing his purse to an underling, and offered "the gentleman present whose name is Fontanin" a salary of six hundred francs a month as from that day, for the next three years, provided that he, Ludwigson, proprietor of the Ludwigson Art Gallery and manager of Messrs. Ludwigson & Co., Art-Dealers, should have sole rights

in all the works of art produced by M. Fontanin during this period, the said works to be signed in the artist's hand and dated. Daniel, least industrious of artists, who had never exhibited or sold a single sketch, had never understood how Ludwigson had come to form so flattering an opinion of his talents as to justify the offer. In any case he was resolved to be sole arbiter of his output and well aware that, had he closed with the offer, he would have taken Ludwigson's money only on furnishing month by month a sufficiency of pictures, ample to cover the salary proposed. But it was one of his pet theories that work should be performed joyfully, without constraint. So, to the stupefaction of his fellow-artists, he had shown Ludwigson the door with icy politeness, and, giving him no time to collect his wits, had made the dealer beat a retreat onto the landing as quickly as he had come.

But that was not the end of it. Ludwigson returned to the attack, but with more tactful strategy, and some months later a business connexion had been established between' the dealer and Daniel-somewhat to the latter's amusement. Ludwigson was the editor of a sumptuous art magazine appearing in three languages; he asked Daniel to select the French articles for publication. The young man's character had pleased him from the start and he was impressed by the excellence of Daniel's taste. The work was far froip boring and Daniel devoted his spare time to it. Very soon he had complete charge of the French section of the magazine. Ludwigson, always lavish in his personal expenditures, made a point of engaging few but carefully selected associates, giving them a free hand, and paying for their work on a generous scale. Daniel, though he had laid no claim to it, was soon being paid the same salary as the English and German collaborators. As he had to earn his living, he preferred an avocation wholly independent of his artistic career. Moreover, some of his drawings (Ludwigson arranged a private show for him) had already made good with certain connoisseurs. The advantages he derived from his association with the picture-dealer enabled him not only to contribute to the welfare of his mother and sister, but to lead the easy life he liked, without being tied down to any rigid task or encroaching on the hours of freedom essential to his true calling.

Jacques caught up his friends at the Boulevard Saint-Germain crossing.

"… the priceless experience," Daniel was saying, "of being introduced to the dowager Mme. Ludwigson."

"Why, I never dreamt that Ludwigson of yours had ever had a mother!" Jacques observed, by way of joining in the conversation.

"Nor did I," Daniel concurred. "And what a mother! Try and imagine—no, only a sketch would do her justice. I've done several, but not from life, worse luck! Imagine a mummy tricked out by some clown to do a circus turn. An old Egyptian Jew, at least a hundred years old, bloated with gout and natural fat, reeking of fried onions, who wears mittens, has pet names for her footmen, calls her son *bambino*, lives on bread soused in red wine, and passes the unwary visitor a tobacco-jar-"

"So the old lady fancies a pipe?" Battaincourt broke in.

"No, it contains—snuff! The old creature's always dribbling black powder on the mass of diamonds with which Ludwigson's thought fit—why, God alone knows—to plaster her dewlaps." A quaint analogy struck him and he paused to find words for it. "Like the lanterns they post round a house that's being pulled down."

Jacques grinned; he was always taken by Daniel's flow of spirits.

"And what did he want to get out of you when he revealed the skeleton in his cupboard?"

"You've guessed it! He has a new scheme up his sleeve. Wonderful chap he is!"

"Wonderful, yes; because he's so damned rich. If he were poor he'd be no better than a——"

Daniel cut him short.

"Leave it at that, if you don't mind. I like him. And he's hit on a sound idea: a series of monographs, *Great Masters in Their Paintings*. That's his long suit: lavishly illustrated handbooks at astounding prices."

Jacques listened no longer; he felt peevish, out of spirits. Over-tired, perhaps, after the day's emotions. Or was it vexation at having been let in for this evening's jaunt, when he so longed for solitude? Or just the chafing of the collar on his neck?

Battaincourt slipped between the two friends. He was waiting for a chance of asking them to act as witnesses at his wedding. For months past, by night and by day, that event had loomed large in his thoughts and under the fever of his desire his bloodless features were visibly wasting away. Now, at last, he had not long to wait. The period set by law to the parental veto had just run out and, that very morning, the date of his wedding had been fixed. In two weeks' time … The thought of it brought the blood to his cheeks; he turned away to hide his blush, took off his hat, and mopped his forehead.

"Don't move!" cried Daniel. "It's fantastic how, in profile, you're the living image of a deer—*d*, double *e, r,* of course!" And indeed Battaincourt had a long nose which almost joined his lip, arched nostrils, round eyes, and, just then, a wisp of towy hair, matted with sweat, that curled up into a little tapering horn above his forehead.

Battaincourt replaced his hat mournfully and let his eyes roam across the Place du Carrousel and Trajan's Arch towards the Tuileries Gardens, where the dust glowed red.

Poor little belling deer, Daniel mused. Who'd have believed him capable of such a passion? There he goes, a traitor to all his principles, quarrelling with his people, and all for that woman! A widow, fourteen years his senior, a shop-soiled widow—attractive, I grant, but shop-soiled. He smiled inwardly, remembering the afternoon last autumn when Simon had badgered him into meeting the fascinating widow—and the sequel of their meeting, a week later… . Well, anyhow, he could honestly say he had done his utmost to restrain Battaincourt from that act of folly. But he was at grips with blind instinct and, since he deferred to passion wherever he encountered it, he had confined himself to steering clear of the lady in question and watching the developments of his friend's matrimonial venture from a safe distance. ,

"For a conquering hero you look pretty glum," observed Battaincourt, who, aggrieved by Daniel's mockery, hoped for amends from Jacques.

"Don't you realize that he wanted to fail?" Daniel suggested. He was surprised by the pensive look in Jacques's eyes and, approaching him, laid his hand on his shoulder, murmuring with a smile: "… 'for each thing has a special and a different value.' "

The words sufficed to bring back the whole passage—Daniel used often to repeat it—to Jacques's mind:

"Woe betide you if you say your happiness is dead because you had not dreamt it would take that shape! … Your dream of tomorrow is a delight—but tomorrow has a delight of its own—and nothing, fortunately, is like the dream we have dreamt of it, for each thing has a special and a different value."

Jacques smiled. "Give me a cigarette." He tried to shake o his lethargy, for Daniel's sake. Your dream of tomorrow is a delight… . And indeed he seemed to feel delight, as yet evasive, hovering round him. Tomorrow? Ah, to awake and see, across his open window, the sun rise level with the tree-tops! Tomorrow: Maisons-La tte, and the cool shadows of the woods!

# II

NOTHING in the sleepy street near the Paris Opera, nothing except a file of cars drawn up along the kerb called the attention of passers-by to an anonymous cabaret with close-drawn blinds. A page swung round the revolving-doors to let them through and Daniel made way for Jacques and Battaincourt to pass, as though he were receiving them at his own house.

Some discreet exclamations greeted Daniel's arrival. Few of the patrons of the place knew his real name; to everyone he was the "Prophet." Just now the cabaret was rather empty. Behind the bar, in the alcove whence a slender spiral staircase, painted white and edged with gold to match the panelling of the room, led up to Mme. Packmell's quarters on the next floor, a piano, violin, and 'cello were playing the hits of the season. The tables had been pushed back against the grey plush settles that flanked the walls and a few couples were dancing a boston on the purple carpet under the last gleams of the sunset filtering through the lace curtains. Close under the ceiling fan-blades droned monotonously, fluttering the pendants of the chandeliers, green foliage of palms, and lifting trailing clouds of muslin about the dancing couples.

Jacques, always swept off his feet by a first glimpse of new surroundings, meekly followed Daniel to a table from which the two rooms could be observed in vista. A group of girls in the further room had pounced on Battaincourt and he had already begun to dance.

"You always need screwing up to the point," Daniel said. "Now that you are here, I'm sure you'll like it. Now, own up, isn't it a homy, cheery little dive?"

"Order a cocktail for me," Jacques broke in on his encomium. "You know the sort—with milk, red-currant juice, and lemon-peel in it."

Young women in white dresses served the customers; they were known as the "nurses."

"Shall I give you a little 'Who's Who' of some of these people?" Daniel asked, changing his seat and coming to sit by Jacques. "That fair woman over there, in blue, to begin with—she's the boss. 'Mother Packmell,' we call her, though, as you see, she's still quite a fetching wench! She's here, there, and everywhere all night long, with the same old smile on her face, amongst her bright young things—rather like a fashionable dressmaker showing off her mannequins. See that dark chap over there who's saying 'How do you do?' to her? Now he's talking to a pale little kid, the girl who was dancing with Battaincourt just now—no, nearer us; that's Paule, the fair young girl who looks like an angel—a slightly, ever so slightly tarnished angel. Look, what's that queer-looking dope she's swilling now? Might be green curafao. The chap who's standing, talking to her, is Nivolsky, the painter, quite a fine fellow in his way; a knave and a liar, but for all that chivalrous as a knight of old! Whenever he turns up late for an appointment he says he's just been fighting a duel, and, for the moment, genuinely believes it. He borrows money right and left and is always broke, but he has talent; he pays his bills with pictures. This is his system, in a nutshell: he spends the summer in the country and paints a strip of road on a canvas fifty yards long—complete with trees, farm-carts, cyclists, a sunset and so on; then, in the winter he retails his road in driblets proportioned to the money owed and his creditor's standing. He says he's Russian and owner of heaven knows how many 'souls.' So, you see, during the Russo-Japanese war, everyone was pulling his leg for staying in Montmartre and indulging in tap-room patriotism. Know what he did? He cleared out, vanished for a year, and returned only after the fall of Port Arthur, bringing with him a sheaf of war-photos; his pockets bulged with them. 'Just observe, old man,' he'd say, 'this battery in action. Do you see that big rock at the back? And just behind the rock the business end of a rifle? Well, old man, I was behind that rifle.' The trouble was that he brought back several crates of sketches, too, and during the next two years he always paid his debts with landscapes of Sicily. Hallo! He's caught on that I'm talking about him; he's flattered. Watch, and you'll see him go through his paces!"

Jacques, resting his elbow on the table, kept silence. In such moods his face seemed emptied of intelligence; with his dull eyes and slightly parted lips he had the look of an animal, brooding and lethargic. Listening to his friend's chatter, he watched Nivolsky and the girl Paule. She had a vanity-box in her hand and, pouting her lips, dabbed them with a lipstick, to which her fingers gave a brisk little twirl, as though she meant to bore a hole with it. As the painter watched her, he kept swinging her bag round and round his finger. It was obvious that theirs was merely a cabaret acquaintanceship; nevertheless, she touched his hands and knee, and set his tie straight. Once, when he leaned towards her confidentially, she pressed her little white hand against his face and teasingly pushed him away. Jacques's senses tingled.

Not far from her a dark woman was sitting by herself, huddled up at the far end of the settle, her black satin cloak drawn tightly round her as though she feared the cold; her ardent gaze was riveted on Paule, who showed no sign of being aware of it.

Jacques's brooding eyes rested on all these folk; was he studying them, or building fancies round them? He had only to watch any one of them for a while to surmise in him or her a maelstrom of emotions. Moreover, he did not seek to analyse the feelings he read into each and could not have put his intuitions into words; he was far too taken by the spectacle before his eyes to double his personality and register his impressions. But, anyhow, this sense of communion, real or illusive, with other beings gave him unbounded pleasure.

"Who is that tall woman talking to the barman?" he asked.

"In peacock-blue, with a necklace down to her knees?"

"Yes. What a cruel face!"

"That's Marie-Josèphe; a name that would become an empress. Fine-looking woman, eh? There's a funny history to those pearls of hers. Are you listening?" With a smile Daniel turned to his friend. "She was kept by Reyvil, the perfume-king's son. Now, Reyvil had a lawful, if unfaithful, spouse at home, who was Josse the banker's mistress… . Look here, are you listening?"

"Yes, yes—with all my ears."

"Well, you look half asleep. Josse is immensely rich and one day he was moved to make a present of some pearls to his mistress, Mme. Reyvil. The problem was how to do so without angering her husband. But Josse is as cute as you make 'em! He faked up a

lottery in aid of the White Slaves' Rescue League, persuaded M. Reyvil, the husband, to take ten tickets at a franc each, and saw to it that Reyvil won the necklace intended for Mme. Reyvil. But then the trouble began. Reyvil wrote to Josse to thank him, but added a postscript asking him not to breathe a word about the lottery to Mme. Reyvil as he had just given the pearls to his mistress, Marie-Josèphe. But there's more to come—the end of the story goes one better. Josse saw red; his one idea was to have the necklace back or, failing that, to have the lady who was wearing it. And, three months later, he'd dropped Mme. Reyvil and cut out his dear friend Reyvil with Marie-Josèphe—exchanged the pearlless wife for the pearl-decked mistress. So now the worthy Reyvil, who has completely forgotten that the necklace only cost him ten paltry francs, declaims in season and out of season against the unspeakableness of the demi-rep! Hallo, Werff!" He paused to shake hands with a handsome youth who had just come in, greeted from the far end of the room with cries of "Apricot! Hi, Apricot!"

"You know each other, don't you?" Daniel asked Jacques, who held out his hand somewhat ungraciously to the new-comer. "Good morrow, fair lady!" Daniel continued, as Paule, the Russian painter's anaemic companion, walked past; and stooped to kiss her hand. "May I introduce my friend Thibault?" he added. Jacques rose. The girl's neurotic eyes just glanced at Jacques's and lingered more intently on Daniel's face; she seemed about to address him, then changed her mind and walked away.

"Do you come here often?" Jacques inquired.

"No. Well . , . yes; several times a week. A habit. And yet, as a rule, I get tired of seeing the same people, the same place, pretty quickly. I like to feel that life is moving on. , . ,"

Suddenly Jacques remembered: "I've passed!" and drew a deep breath. An idea flashed through his mind.

"Do you know when the Maisons-Laffitte telegraph-office shuts down?"

"It's closed by now. But, if you send a wire at once, your father will get it first thing in the morning."

Jacques beckoned to a page.

"Telegraph-blank, please."

He scribbled the telegram in such feverish haste, and this belated eagerness to announce his success was so like Jacques, that Daniel smiled and leaned over his friend's shoulder; but only to draw back hastily, surprised and even annoyed by his unwitting tactlessness. He had read, not M. Thibault's address, but: "Mme. de Fontanin, Chemin de la Forêt, Maisons-Laffitte."

A buzz of curiosity had greeted the appearance of an elderly dame, a familiar figure at the cabaret, who had just come in accompanied by a pretty, dark girl whose observant air, though in no wise timid, gave the impression that this was her first visit to the place.

"Hallo, something new!" Daniel murmured under his breath.

Werff, who happened to be passing, smiled.

"Don't you know? Ma Juju's launching a 'deb.' "

"Damned pretty little thing, anyhow," commented Daniel after taking a good look at her.

Jacques turned. Yes, she was really charming, with her bright eyes, natural complexion, and general air of not "belonging" here. Her gauzy dress was of the palest pink; she wore no ornaments, no jewels. Beside her even the youngest women present looked tawdry.

Daniel had returned to his seat beside Jacques.

"You should get a close-up view of Ma Juju," he suggested. "I know her well; she's quite a character. Nowadays she enjoys a social standing of sorts; she has quite a nice flat and an at-home day, indulges in evening parties, and gives young girls their start in life. Her peculiarity was that she would never let a man keep her; she was just a nice little prostitute and never tried to 'better' herself. For thirty years she figured on the police register and plied her trade between the Madeleine and the Rue Drouot. But her life fell into two compartments: from nine a.m. till five p.m. she went as Mme. Barbin and led a quiet middle-class existence in a ground-floor flat in the Rue Richer, with a hanging lamp, a housemaid, and all the household cares of that walk of life—accounts to keep, the stock-markets to be watched with an eye to her investments, servant troubles, family ties, nephews and nieces, birthdays, and, to crown all, a children's party round the Christmas tree. It's gospel truth. Then at five each evening, wet or fine, she doffed her flannel camisole for a smart tailor-made coat and skirt and sallied forth, without the least compunction, on her beat; Mme. Barbin had changed to Juju, pretty lady, a keen worker, ever cheerful, never glum, and a familiar, well-liked client of all the accommodating hotels along the boulevards."

Jacques could not take his eyes off Ma Juju. With her laughing, energetic, rather cunning face, she had the genial aspect of a country parish priest; her bobbed hair showed snow-white beneath a wideawake hat.

"Without the least compunction …" Jacques repeated pensively.

"Of course," said Daniel. There was a touch of raillery, almost of aggressiveness in his manner as, glancing towards Jacques, he murmured Whitman's lines:

> "You prostitutes flaunting over the trottoirs or obscene in your rooms,
> Who am I that I should call you more obscene than myself?"

Daniel knew he was administering a shock to Jacques's modesty and he did it deliberately, for it irritated him to see how easily Jacques, for months on end—was it by way of a reaction against his friend's loose living?—endured a life of all but perfect chastity. Daniel was simple-minded enough, in fact, to be greatly upset about it and he knew that Jacques too was sometimes, rather uneasy about the insidious lethargy gaining on a temperament which in early youth showed promise of more ardent ways. Once in the course of the past winter they had broached that delicate topic; it was on their way home from the theatre, as they threaded their way along the boulevards dense with a seething "crowd of lovers. Daniel had expressed amazement at his companion's apathy. "Still," Jacques answered, "I'm fit as a fiddle. At my army medical I noticed that they put me in the top class physically." But Daniel had remarked a quaver of anxiety in his friend's voice.

His musings were cut short by the arrival of Favery, who had appeared in the offing and was looking in their direction; with studied nonchalance he committed hat, stick, and gloves to the cloak-room attendant. He hailed Jacques with a grin.

"Hasn't your brother come yet?"

In the evening Favery always wore collars that were a trifle too high, new suits that looked as if they were someone else's, and he stuck out his smooth-shaven chin with a jaunty air that prompted Werff to sneer: "See the conquering proctor comes!"

"I've passed!" thought Jacques, with half a mind to take French leave and catch an evening train to Maisons-Laffitte. Only the thought that Antoine had promised to meet him here and might turn up at any moment held him back. If not tonight, he consoled himself, then tomorrow morning very early. And at the thought the cabaret faded out and, drenched in coolness, he was watching the new-risen sun drinking up the dew along the avenues.

A blinding flash as all the lights went on together startled him out of his daydream. I—have—passed! The thought seemed to restore at once his contact with reality. He looked round for his friend and espied Daniel talking confidentially to Ma Juju in a corner of the room. Daniel was perched sideways on, a swivel-chair and his vivacious gestures as he rattled on brought out the graceful poise of his head, the bright awareness of his eyes and smile, the shapeliness of his hands poised in mid-air—hands, look, and smile spoke no less than his lips. Jacques could not take his eyes off him. How handsome he looks! was his unformulated thought. How fine that one so young, so splendidly alive, should sink himself so utterly in the Now, the Here! And do it all so naturally! He doesn't know I'm watching him, or give it a thought; he has no notion of being under scrutiny. Curious, to catch a fellow unawares like that, to pry into his inmost secrets! How can anyone manage to be so oblivious of his surroundings, when in public? When he talks, he is wholeheartedly in what he says. I'm different; I can't be "natural." I could never give myself away like that—except in a closed room, safe from prying eyes. And even then …! He gave his musings pause. Daniel's not so very observant, he resumed, that's why he's not absorbed, as I am, by environment; he can remain himself. Jacques pondered again; then, as he rose from his seat, he summed the matter up: But I am always an easy prey to the world around me… .

"No, my charming Prophet," Ma Juju was admonishing Daniel at that moment, "it's no use begging; that little girl is not for you." The suppressed fury in Daniel's eyes made her burst into laughter. "Well, upon my word! Have a nice sit-down, dearie, and you'll get over it!"

This Parthian shot was one of a batch of pointless gags—others were: "That's nobody's business," "Be my mascot, baby!" "That ain't nothing so long as you keep fit"—one of the second-hand phrases, restocked from time to time, wherewith the Packmell "crowd" were wont to interlard their conversation in and out of season, smiling the while masonically.

"But how did you get to know her?" Daniel insisted; his eyes were obdurate.

"No, my dear. Nothing doing in that quarter. She's one in a thousand, that kid, a nice little thing and no nonsense about her. A top-notcher!"

"Tell me how you got to know her."

"Will you leave her alone?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, it was when I had the pleurisy—remember? She heard about it and turned up one day, all out of her own head. And, don't forget, I hardly knew the girl'—I'd helped her a bit once or twice, but only in a small way. You see the kid had had a deal of trouble, a rotten time of it. She'd fallen in love with a society man, as far as I can make out, and there was a child (wouldn't think it, now, would you?) who died almost at once, with the result that one can't mention the word 'baby' without her starting to howl! Anyhow, when I had my attack, she came and settled in at my place, like a trained nurse, and, day and night for six weeks and more, she looked after me better than if she'd been my own daughter. Why, there were days she put as many as a hundred cupping-glasses on my chest. Yes, my dear, she saved my life, and that's gospel truth. And didn't spend a sou. One in a thousand! So I swore I'd see her fixed up all right. These young folk, they're always running after whims and fancies. But my job's to see her launched, properly launched, you know. … By the way, you might lend me a hand there—I'll explain presently… . She hasn't been out of my sight for three months now. First I had to find a name for her. Her real name is Victorine—Victorine Le Gad. 'Le Gad,' a double-barrelled name, might pass. But 'Victorine'—I ask you! So I changed it to 'Rinette.' Not bad, eh? And the rest to match. Colin's given her elocution lessons; she had a Breton accent you could cut with a knife; well, she's kept just the right dash of it, a bit of a foreign twang—might be English—delicious anyhow. She learnt the boston in a fortnight; she's light as a feather. What's more, she's no fool. She sings in tune; a real rich voice she has, with a tang of the gutter in it; that's how I like 'em! So there she is, shipshape, ready to be launched. The one thing now is to give her a good send-off. No, don't laugh; that's where *you* come in. I've talked to Ludwigson about her; since Bertha gave him the air, he's all at a loose end. He's promised to come tonight to meet the child. Put in a word saying you like her and he'll be as keen as mustard. Ludwigson, you see, is exactly the man to suit her. She has only one idea: to collect a little nest-egg and go back to Brittany, where her home is. Damned silly, but there you are! All Bretonnes are like that. A cottage near the village pump, the usual white streamers, and plenty of processions—just Brittany, in a word! She's not asking for the moon; if she keeps straight and listens to reason, she'll get what she wants in no time. I hope she'll have twenty thousand francs put away by the New Year and I know just how I'm going to invest them for her… . Look here, do you know anything about the Rand market?"

Hungry voices vociferated: "Dinner! Take your seats!"

Daniel returned to Jacques.

"Hasn't your brother come yet? Anyhow let's pick our seats."

The long table was laid for twenty people; there was some hesitation as they chose their places. Daniel so manoeuvred that Jacques was placed beside Rinette, on her left; Ma Juju, who clung to her like a leech, sat on her right, as close as she could squeeze beside her. But just when everyone had picked his place and Jacques was about to take his own, Daniel forestalled him.

"Change with me!"

Without more ado he pulled Jacques to one side, gripping his arm so roughly that Jacques felt his fingers nipping his wrist and all but gave a squeal of pain.

Daniel was too preoccupied to think of excusing himself. He turned to Ma Juju.

"Isn't it up to you, Ma Juju, to introduce me to my neighbour?"

"Ah, there you are!" muttered the old lady, who had just noticed Daniel's ruse. Then she apostrophized the company at large:

"May I introduce Mile. Rinette to you all?" and added in menacing tones: "She's under my wing."

"Introduce us!" voices clamoured on all sides. "Introduce us to her!"

"Save us, what a to-do they're making!" sighed Ma Juju, and with a bad grace she removed her hat and tossed it to one of the "nurses" waiting at table. She pointed to Daniel first of all.

"This is the Prophet," she announced, "and a real bad egg!"

"How do you do?" said the girl amiably. Daniel took her hand and kissed it.

"Next, please!"

"His friend—I don't know his name." Ma Juju's finger indicated Jacques.

"How do you do?" said Rinette.

"Next: Paule, Sylvia, Mme. Dolores—also a child unknown; the Wonder-Child, no doubt. Then Werff, *alias* 'Apricot,' and Gaby. The Chump."

"Thanks," a sarcastic voice broke in; "I prefer the name of my forefathers. Favery, Mademoiselle, and one of your most ardent admirers."

"Be my mascot, baby!" someone chirped ironically.

"Lily and Harmonica, or the Inseparables," Ma Juju went on, steeled against interrupters. "The Colonel. Maud, Queen of the Garden. A gentleman I don't know and with him two ladies whom I know very well, though I can't recall their names. An empty chair. Ditto another. Then Battaincourt, otherwise 'Little Batt.' Marie-Josèphe, plus the pearls. Madame Packmell." Then, with a bow, she added: "And Ma Juju, your humble servant."

"How do you do? How do you do?" Rinette echoed herself in silvery cadences, smiling without a shadow of' constraint.

"Rinette's no sort of name for her," Favery observed. "What about Miss Howd'youdo?"

"Why not?" the girl replied.

"Three cheers for Miss Howd'youdo!"

Smiling still, she seemed delighted by their noisy acclamations.

"And now, the soup!" The suggestion came from Mme. Packmell.

Jacques nudged Daniel with his elbow and showed him the bruise on his wrist.

"What ever came over you just now?"

His friend threw him a quizzing glance, without the least sign of contrition, a glance that was ardent to the point of fierceness.

" 'I am he that aches with amorous love,' " he quoted in English, lowering his voice.

Jacques leaned forward to examine Rinette, who happened to be looking towards him; he met her cool eyes, green-glistening like Marennes oysters.

Daniel continued in the same low voice:

" 'Does the earth gravitate? Does not all matter aching attract all matter?

" 'So the body of me to all I meet and know.' "

Jacques frowned slightly. This was not the first time he had chanced to witness one of these paroxysms of passion which carried Daniel off his feet in quest of pleasure, beyond all possibility of restraint. And each of them made a rift in Jacques's affection despite his efforts to keep it whole. A comic detail shifted the trend of his thoughts; he had suddenly noticed that the inner surface of Daniel's nose was lined with jet-black down, making his nostrils like the vent-holes of a mask. Then his eyes fell on-the "Prophet's" hands, fine, tapering hands, shaded too with dusky down. *Vir pilosus*, he thought, repressing a smile.

Daniel leaned towards him again and continued in the same low tone, as though finishing the quotation from Whitman.

"Fill up your neighbour's glass, my dear."

"Mme. Packmell, the menu ith quite illegible thith. evening," lisped a voice from the far end of the table.

"Two black marks against Mme. Packmell!" declared Favery severely.

"That ain't nothing so long as you keep fit," the comely blonde riposted philosophically.

Jacques was sitting next to Paule, the slightly tarnished angel with the snow-white skin. Beyond her sat a big-breasted girl who never spoke and applied her napkin to her lips after each spoonful. Further on, almost facing Jacques, beside a dark woman whose forehead rippled with tiny curls—Dolores, as Ma Juju called her—sat a little boy, seven or eight years old, dressed in rather shabby black; his eyes followed every movement of the others and, now and again, a smile lit up his face.

Jacques addressed the girl beside him:

"Why, they've forgotten your soup."

"Thanks, I'm not taking any."

She kept her eyes lowered and only raised them to look in Daniel's direction. She had tried her best to get a seat beside him but at the last minute had seen him exchanging chairs with his friend; Jacques was to blame for this, she thought. Where had this fellow with the spotty face and a boil on his neck sprung from? Her pet aversion was redheads, and there was something in Jacques's looks and in his auburn hair that put him in this category. Only to see the disorderly mat over his forehead, his jowl and loose-set ears, you knew him for a bit of a brute!

Mme. Dolores's shrill voice broke in:

"Well, what's come over you? Why don't you put your napkin on?" She jerked the youngster to and fro, tucking the starched linen, which half submerged him in its folds, into his collar.

"When a woman owns to a certain age," Favery was laying down the law to Marie-Josephè, "it means she's past it. She got into the Conservatoire, I tell you, at the extreme age-limit exactly forty-five years ago, by producing her younger sister's birth-certificate—which made her two years under her true age. So it comes to this …"

"That's nobody's business," Ma Juju declared in a loud stage-whisper.

"Favery is one of those excellent folk who can never engage in a conversation without premising that the rate of velocity for falling bodies is 32 feet, 2 inches per second at Paris," observed Werff, who once had crammed for the Polytechnic. He owed the nickname of Apricot to the hue of his skin; it had been burnt to a dull gold, spangled with freckles, by his practice of open-air sports. He cut a handsome figure, with his supple shoulders, strongly moulded face, and full, red lips; by night his sunburnt cheeks and blue eyes radiated hale well-being, a muscular gusto regaled by the day's athletics.

"Nobody knows what he died of," someone remarked, eliciting a jesting repartee. "The real mystery was what he lived on!"

"Hurry up now!" Mme. Dolores admonished the boy. "They serve dessert here, you know—but you shan't have any."

"Why?" the lad pleaded, turning his shining eyes towards her.

"Because you shan't if I say no! Now do as you're told, hurry up!" She saw that Jacques was watching and sped him a confidential smile. "He's a fussy kid, you see. He shies off anything he's not used to. Salmis of pigeon—you won't see that every day, my pet! Gammon and greens came his way oftener than pigeon, I should say. He's been spoilt. Fussed over, petted, like all only children. Especially as his mother was an invalid for so long. That's what he is"—she stroked the child's round, close-cropped head—"a spoilt child. A naughty, spoilt child. But, now his aunt's in charge of him, there'll be a change. Our young gentleman wanted to keep his lovelocks, like a little girl, eh? We'll hear no more about those fads of his; no more pampering for him. Eat your dinner now. The gentleman's looking. Be quick!" Delighted to have an audience, she cast another smile in the direction of Jacques and Paule. "He's a little orphan," she announced complacently. "He lost his mother only this week; she was married to my brother. She died in her village down in Lorraine—of consumption. Poor little kid," she added, "it's lucky for him that I am willing to look after him. He has no one in the world now except me. But I shall have my hands full!"

The little boy had ceased eating and was staring at his aunt. Did he understand? There was a curious intonation in his voice as he questioned her.

"Was it my mummy who died?"

"Don't bother with questions. Eat your dinner!"

"Don't want to now."

"There you are! That's how he is," Mme. Dolores lamented. "Well, if you must know, it *was* your mummy who died. Now do as you're told and go on eating, or you won't have any ice-cream."

Paule averted her eyes just then and, as their looks crossed, Jacques saw the image of his own distress. Her neck was slim and lithe and very pale, still paler than her cheeks; its slender grace invited thoughts of dalliance. As his gaze rested on her fine-grained skin, shaded with a slight down, a faint savour of sweetness rose to his lips. He groped for something to say, found nothing, and smiled. Watching him from the corner of an eye, she found him less uncouth. But a sudden twinge at her heart brought a deathly pallor to her face; resting her hands on the table edge, she let her head sink back a little, biting her tongue to save herself from fainting.

Seeing her thus, Jacques pictured a bird alighted on the tablecloth, there to die.

"What is it?" he whispered.

Her eyes were swimming and a line of white showed between her half-shut eyelids. Without moving she forced out two words:

"Say nothing!"

A lump had risen to his throat and, even had he wished, he could not have called out. In any case the others paid no heed to them. He looked at Paule's hands; her rigid fingers, diaphanous like tiny tapers, had grown so livid that the nails showed up as patches of dark violet.

"My alarm goes off at six-thirty," Favery was explaining to the girl beside him, with chuckles of self-satisfaction, "standing in a saucer poised precariously on a tumbler …"

Meanwhile Paule's colour had returned a little and she opened her eyes again; turning, she weakly smiled her thanks to Jacques for his silence.

"It's over," she murmured breathlessly. "I'm liable to these attacks— my heart, you know." Then she added ruefully, with lips that quivered still: "Have a nice sit-down, dearie, and you'll get over it!"

He had an impulse to catch her in his arms and carry her far, far away from all this sordidness; in a daydream he devoted all his life to her and made her well. So potent was the love he felt within him for any weaker being who might claim, or merely accept, the refuge of his strength! He had half a mind to tell Daniel of his fantastic scheme, but Daniel's thoughts were otherwise occupied.

Daniel was chatting with Ma Juju, across Rinette; a pretext for watching the girl beside him and feeling her warm nearness. Though all through the meal he had diplomatically refrained from addressing her in any but the briefest phrases, while paying court to her with delicate attentions, she obviously filled his thoughts. On several occasions she had noticed his eyes fixed on her and on each occasion, though she could not analyse the cause, his look, far from attracting her, evoked a feeling of estrangement; she was not blind to the virile charm of Daniel's face, but it annoyed her.

Meanwhile a heated discussion was in progress at the far end of the table.

"Conceited ass!" Apricot apostrophized Favery, who pleaded guilty.

"That's what I often say to myself!"

"But not loudly enough, I fear."

Amidst the general laughter Werff kept the upper hand.

"My dear Favery," he declared, deliberately raising his voice, "allow me to tell you something: what you've just said about women proves that you don't know what to say to them."

Daniel glanced at Favery. The young pedagogue was laughing and Daniel fancied he saw him glance towards Rinette, as though she had been the theme of the discussion. There was a certain effrontery, a lewdness, in Favery's look which gave a fillip to Daniel's antipathy for him. He knew stories about Favery which did him little credit, and felt a brutal impulse to retail them in Rinette's hearing. And he never could resist impulses of that order. Lowering his voice so as to be heard by the two women only, he bent towards Ma Juju in such a way as to include Rinette in the conversation, and asked in a casual voice:

"Do you know that one about Favery and the woman taken in adultery?"

The old woman snapped at the bait.

"No, let's hear it! And chuck us a cigarette' This dinner seems likely to last all night."

"One fine day—she'd been his mistress for a good spell then—the woman rolled up at his place with a valise in her hand. 'I've had enough of it. I want to live with you,' and the usual stuff. 'But how about your husband?' 'Him? I've just written him this letter: "Dear Eugène, I have come to a turning-point in my life," and so on … "I want, as I have the right, to bestow my affection on a heart that understands," and so on and so forth… . "That heart—I have found it, and so I leave you." '

"And what a heart—I ask you!

"That was her lookout. But guess what happened next! Old Favery was in the devil of a stew. A woman on his hands and, what was worse, a woman who'd soon be divorced and free to insist on his marrying her. Then he brought off what he claims to be a stroke of genius. He sent this letter to the woman's husband: 'Dear Sir, I hereby inform you that your wife has left her home with the intention of coming to live with me. Faithfully yours . , ."

"Very decent of him," Rinette remarked.

"So you think!" A malicious smile flitted across Daniel's face. "But wait a bit! Favery's astute; he was simply taking his precautions for the future. Her husband, he knew, would produce the letter in court. And the marriage of an unfaithful wife with her lover is forbidden by law. So Favery winds up his story with the maxim: Heaven helps those who know the Civil Code."

Rinette pondered a while; then it dawned on her.

"A dirty trick!"

Daniel, as he bent towards her, felt her breath hover on his face and lips, and he took a deep breath, almost closing his eyes.

"So he let her drop, eh?" the old woman inquired.

Daniel did not reply. Rinette looked towards him. He kept his eyes lowered now, for he felt powerless to hide their frenzy of desire. Close to her eyes she saw the smoothness of his skin, the savage line of his mouth, his quivering lashes, and, as though she long had known and tested their dark treacheries, something within her, urgent as an instinct, turned her suddenly against him.

"But what became of the woman?" Ma Juju asked again.

"They say she killed herself. His version is that she was consumptive." With a forced smile he passed his fingers across his forehead.

Rinette drew herself up, shrinking against the back of her chair, so as to keep as far apart as possible from Daniel. What was the cause of this revulsion that had come over her so suddenly? His face, his smile, his expression—all about this handsome youth repelled her; his way of leaning forward, the grace of his gestures, and most of all, his long, sensitive hands. Never had she dreamt there slumbered in her heart, biding their time but so far held in leash, such potencies of loathing for a total stranger.

"So, in other words, I'm a flirt!" exclaimed Marie-Josephè, calling the company to witness.

Battaincourt smiled ingenuously.

"Am I to blame if our language has no other word to describe that most charming of traits: the desire to fascinate?"

"Oh, how disgusting!" Mme. Dolores's shrill voice broke in.

All eyes turned in her direction, only to find that the little boy had spilt a spoonful of cream on his black coat and was being hauled away by his aunt towards the lavatory.

Jacques profited by her eclipse to question Paule, glad of this chance of breaking the ice.

"You know her?"

"Slightly."

Paule's impulse was to stop there; she was naturally reserved, and felt depressed. But, as Jacques had been so nice to her just now, she continued. "She's not a bad sort, you know. And she's well off. She was once, for quite a long while, the mistress of a fellow who writes plays. Then she married a pharmacist. He's dead now and his patent medicines bring her in a tidy income still—the 'Dolores Corn-Cure,' you must have heard of it. No? Better tell her so, she always carries samples in her bag. A striking woman, you'll see; quite a character. She keeps a dozen cats picked up here, there, and everywhere, and a large aquarium of fishes in her bedroom. She loves animals."

"But not children."

Paule shook her head.

"That's the sort she is," she concluded.

Jacques noticed that after speaking she breathed with difficulty. All the same he wanted to prolong their talk. The reminder that she had heart-disease brought to his lips, somewhat inaptly, a familiar phrase: "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."

She reflected a moment, then, strumming on the table with her fingers, corrected him:

"It should be: 'The heart its reasons has …' The first way it didn't sound like poetry."

His longing for her persisted, but he now felt less disposed to devote his life to her. No sooner, he thought, am I allowed the smallest glimpse into another's soul than I am half in love already! He recalled the first occasion when he noticed this habit of his: one day during the previous summer he had gone for a walk with some of Antoine's friends in the Viroflay woods; a Swedish girl, studying medicine at Paris, had leaned on his arm and chattered to him of her childhood. …

Suddenly he realized that it was half-past nine and Antoine had not yet come. A panic fear came over him and, forgetting everything else, he clutched Daniel's arm and shook it.

"I'm positive something's happened to him!"

"What …?"

"To Antoine."

Dinner had just ended and people were leaving their seats. Jacques rose to his feet. Daniel was standing too and, while manoeuvring to keep in touch with Rinette, tried to reassure his friend.

"Don't be an ass, Jacques! He's a doctor. An urgent call …"

But Jacques was already out of earshot. Unable to collect his wits or master his forebodings, he had hurried off to the cloak-room. Without saying goodbye to anyone or giving a thought to Paule, he ran outside. "It's my fault," horror-stricken, he admonished himself. "I've brought Antoine bad luck. My fault! My fault! And all to have a black suit, like that fellow at the Medicis crossing!"

The three-piece band had just struck up a waltz and a few couples had started dancing near the bar. Daniel saw Favery's chin uptilted, as if he sniffed the air, his twinkling eyes fixed on Rinette, and, by a quick move, forestalled him.

"Shall we …?"

She had noticed his approach and met it with a hostile look. She gave him time enough to bend a little towards her before replying.

"No."

He masked his surprise with a smile.

" 'No.' Why 'no'?" he said, mimicking her intonation. So sure was he of getting his way that he took a step towards her. "Come along!" The touch of over-confidence in his gesture clinched her distaste.

"No, not with you," she said pointedly.

"No?" he repeated; but there was a challenging gleam in his dark eyes that seemed to say: "My time will come!"

She turned away and, noticing Favery's hesitant approach, went up to him as if he had already asked her for the dance. They danced together in silence.

Ludwigson had just arrived. Wearing a dinner-jacket and an incongruous straw hat, he stood beside the bar, chatting with Mother Packmell and Marie-Josephè, whose necklace he was fingering complacently. But stealthily his slow eyes, slotted between reptilian lids, would alight, like a blow from a loaded cane, on something or someone present, summing up the company.

Ma Juju steered a course between the dancers, in quest of Rinette. When she had found the girl, she nudged her with her elbow,

"Hurry up! And remember what I said!"

Paule had buttonholed Daniel in a corner of the room and he was listening to her with a faraway smile. He watched Ma Juju proceeding with the most natural air in the world to join Marie-Josephè's group, while Rinette, ceasing to dance, went and sat down alone at a distant table in the far room. A moment later Ludwigson and Ma Juju crossed both rooms and joined her there. Ludwigson always— and especially when he knew he was being looked at—stiffened his back, like an old-time cabby, as he walked. He knew only too well that nature had cursed him with a houri's hind parts and that whenever he moved fast his hips were apt to sway from side to side; so he stepped delicately. He pressed his thick lips on Rinette's proffered hand. As he made the gesture Daniel noted his somewhat receding skull, plastered with black and skilfully dekinked hair. "The fellow's got a distinction of his own all the same," he said to himself. "There's a touch of the coolie in our Levantine mountebank—but something of the Grand Turk, too."

As Ludwigson slowly drew off his gloves his expert, appraising gaze was sizing up Rinette. He sat down facing her, Ma Juju beside him. Drinks were served at once, though Ludwigson had given no order; they knew his ways. He never drank champagne, but always Asti—a still variety—not iced or even cool, but slightly warmed. "Tepid," he explained, "like the yuice of frucht in sunshine."

Daniel left Paule and, lighting a cigarette, strolled round the bar, greeting his friends; then he returned and settled down in the further room. Ludwigson and Ma Juju had their backs to him, but he was directly opposite Rinette, though the full width of the room lay between them. A breezy conversation had sprung up all at once around the glasses of Asti. Rinette was smiling at Ludwigson's sallies; leaning towards her, he made no secret of his admiration and spared no pains to please her. When she saw Daniel watching she put on an even gayer air.

The two rooms adjoined, and dancing couples kept coming and going through the opening between them. A little rosy-cheeked "professional," who might have stepped out of a Lawrence canvas, had perched herself on the first step of the tiny white staircase behind the bar, and, with both hands on the banisters and standing on one leg, she swung the other to and fro in time with the music, and yelled, her face uptilted, a meaningless refrain that everyone that summer knew by heart:

*"Timmyloo, lammylod, pan, pan, timmylahl"*

Daniel, a cigarette between his lips, rested his head on his hands; his eyes were riveted on Rinette. He had ceased smiling; his features had grown rigid, his lips pinched. "Where have I seen him before?" the girl asked herself. She laughed over-noisily, studiously evading Daniel's gaze. But evasion grew more and more difficult; oftener and oftener, like a lark lured towards a mirror, she found her attention caught and held by his unswerving eyes. Shadowed yet clear, they seemed precisely focused on a point in space far beyond Rinette; keen, burning eyes and never faltering; twin magnets from whose pull she managed to break free each time, but each time found it harder.

Suddenly Daniel felt something moving almost at his side. Such was the tension of his nerves that he could not help starting. It was the little orphan who had gone to sleep on the settle, curled up in Dolores's silky mantle, one finger near his mouth, and eyelashes still moist with half-dried tears.

The band had ceased playing while the violinist went his round in quest of tips. When he came to Daniel the latter slipped a banknote under the napkin.

"The next boston—make it last a quarter of an hour, non-stop," he whispered. The musician's dusky eyelashes fluttered in assent.

Daniel felt that Rinette was watching him and, raising his eyes, he took possession of her gaze. And now he knew that it was in his thrall; once or twice—to amuse himself—he played at cat-and-mouse, pouncing on it and letting it go, to test his power. And then … he let it go no more.

Ludwigson, greatly smitten, waxed more and more insistent in his wooing, while the attention Rinette paid him grew more and more perfunctory and vacillating. When the violin struck up another waltz, from the first touch of the bow upon the strings, she knew by the thrill his tense features gave her that things were coming to a head. Yes, there was Daniel getting up! Coolly, with eyes fixed on his prey, he crossed the room, came straight up to her. It flashed across him that he was risking his post with Ludwigson and the thought was like a rowel to his passion. Rinette watched him come, and in her glassy stare there was something so abnormal that Ludwigson and Ma Juju both swung round at once. Ludwigson, imagining that Daniel meant to greet him, made a tentative gesture in his direction. But Daniel did not seem even to know him. As he leaned forward his look bored into the girl's sea-green eyes, bright with mingled terror and consent. Subdued, she rose. Without a word he slipped his arm around her, drew her close, and disappeared with her into the further room where the band was playing.

For a second or two Ludwigson and Ma Juju sat in stony silence, blankly staring at their retreating backs. Then their eyes met.

"Well, of all the damned cheek …!" Ma Juju could heardly speak and her double chin quivered with fury.

Ludwigson's eyebrows lifted, but he did not answer. He was naturally so pale that he could not grow paler. The nails of his huge fingers glowed darkly like cornelians as he reached for his glass and raised the Asti to his lips.

Ma Juju was panting like a winded sprinter. "Anyhow," she ventured, with the dry chuckle of a woman getting her revenge, "that means the sack for the young scallawag, I guess, as far as you're concerned."

Ludwigson looked surprised.

"M. de Fontanin? But why should you think that?"

His smile implied that a man of breeding does not stoop to such acts of petty spite. Cool and collected, he drew on his gloves. Perhaps, indeed, he was genuinely tickled at the situation. Taking a note from his pocket-book, he tossed it onto the table and rose with a courteous gesture of farewell to Ma Juju. Then he went to the room where dancing was in progress and halted on the threshold till the couple came round to where he stood. Daniel caught his drowsy gaze, in which a spice of malice mingled with jealousy and admiration; then he saw him sidling past the settles towards the exit and vanish through the swinging-door, which seemed to swish him round in its wake, into the outer darkness.

Daniel waltzed slowly; his body did not seem to move, and he held his head erect. There was a certain coolness in his deportment, partly ease and partly stiffness; he danced on the tips of his toes and his feet never left the ground. Rinette, lost to her surroundings—whether spellbound or outraged, she could not decide—followed so perfectly Daniel's least movements that it was as if they had always danced together. After ten minutes they were the last couple left in; the others, whose energy had failed them long before, formed a circle round them. Five more minutes passed and left them dancing still. Then, after a last repeat, the band cried quarter. They danced on till the final chord—the girl half swooning on his shoulder, Daniel self-possessed, veiling with closed eyelids the burning gaze which now and again he let fall on her, thrilling her by turns with loathing and desire.

To the accompaniment of clapping hands Daniel led Rinette back to Ludwigson's table, quite composedly took the vacant chair, asked for another glass, and, filling it with Asti, gaily lifted it to Ma Juju and drained it at a draught.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed. "What syrup!"

Rinette broke into a nervous laugh and her eyes filled with tears.

Ma Juju stared at Daniel, big-eyed with wonder; her anger had evaporated. She rose and, shrugging her shoulders, sighed comically.

"Well, that ain't nothing so long as you keep fit!"

Half an hour later Daniel and Rinette left Packmell's together.

Rain had fallen.

"A taxi?" the page inquired.

"Let's walk a bit first," Rinette proposed. There was a soft fall in her voice that Daniel found charming.

Despite the rain, the air was still sultry. The ill-lit streets Were empty. They went slowly on along the rain-bright sidewalk.

An infantryman passed by; he held two Women by the waist and was laughingly teaching them how to change step. "Left, right! Not like that. Hop on your left foot! Left, right!" Laughter rang receding, long echoing along the silent house-fronts.

When they left the cabaret she thought he would slip his arm through hers at once. But Daniel so keenly relished joys deferred that he would postpone them almost to the breaking-point. She made the first move, startled by a distant flash of lightning.

"The storm's not over yet. It'll rain again."

"And that will be delightful." His voice was like a caress, charged with hidden meanings, rather too subtle for the girl, whom his aloofness disconcerted.

"You know, I can't get it out of my head that I've seen you somewhere before."

He smiled in the shadow, thankful that she kept to commonplace remarks. He was far from suspecting that she really thought she had met him before, and all but answered: "Nor can I," by way of joining in the game; then, of course, they would fall to guessing when it had happened. But it amused him more to go on mystifying her by keeping silence.

"Why do they call you 'Prophet'?" she asked, after a pause.

"Because my name is Daniel."

"Daniel what …?"

He hesitated, reluctant to drop the defensive, even on a minor point. Still Rinette's curiosity was so patently ingenuous that he felt it unfair to dupe her with a false name.

"Daniel de Fontanin."

She did not reply, but gave a start of astonishment. She's stumbled, he thought, and made as if to come to her aid; but she eluded him. That was enough to make him eager to coerce her and, going up to her, he tried to take her arm. Swerving nimbly aside, she kept beyond his reach; then suddenly she turned away, making for a side-street. Playing a game with me, he thought; well, I'll join in! But it looked as if she were trying to escape him in earnest; she quickened her step till he could hardly keep his distance without breaking into a run. Their point-to-point along the deserted streets amused him. But, when she dived into a darker street that would have brought them back, by a roundabout way, to their starting-point, feeling rather tired, he made a third attempt to grasp her arm. She eluded him again.

"Don't be so silly!" he cried angrily. "Stop now!"

But she fled all the faster, darting into patches of shadow and constantly swerving from one sidewalk to the other, as if she really meant to shake off his pursuit. All at once she broke into a run. With a few strides he drew level and brought her to bay before a door-porch. Then on her face he caught a look of terror that could not have been feigned.

"What's the matter?"

She crouched in the dripping doorway, panting, staring up at him with haggard eyes. He thought for a moment. It was clear to him, though he could make nothing of it, that she had had some serious shock. He tried to draw her towards him; she recoiled in such panic haste that a flounce of her dress was torn.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked again, moving back a pace. "Are you afraid of me? Or do you feel ill?"

A nervous shudder passed through her body; she could not utter a sound and never took her eyes off him.

It was all as much a mystery as ever, but now he took pity on her.

"Would you rather I left you?"

She nodded. Feeling slightly ridiculous, he repeated his question: "You mean it? You'd rather I went away?" He might have been soothing a lost child, such was the gentleness he put into his voice.

"Yes." Her tone was almost brutal.

Obviously, he decided, this was no acting. He realized that any more insistence on his part would be unmannerly and, suddenly resigned to losing her, determined to take it like a sport.

"Have it your own way," he said. "Only I can't leave you stranded here in the middle of the night, in this doorway. We'll hunt round for a taxi first, and then I'll leave you… . Right?"

The lights of the Avenue de l'Opera were visible in the distance and they walked silently towards them. Quite soon an empty taxi came their way and, at a sign from Daniel, drew up beside the kerb. Rinette kept her eyes fixed on the ground. Daniel opened the door. Only when her foot was on the step did she turn towards him and look him in the face; it was as if something compelled her to survey him once again. With a forced smile he stood before her, bare-headed, doing his best to keep up the appearance of a friend who is bidding a casual goodbye. Once she was sure he would not try to accompany her, her features relaxed. She told the driver where to go. Then, turning to Daniel, she whispered an apology.

"I'm sorry, but tonight, M. Daniel, you must leave me. I'll explain tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, then," he said, with a bow. "But—where?"

"Oh, yes… . Where?" she repeated innocently. "At Mme. Juju's, if you like. Yes, at her place. Three o'clock."

"Right!"

He took her extended hand in his, and his lips lightly brushed the tips of her gloved fingers.

The taxi started.

Then suddenly a gust of anger swept over Daniel. He was just mastering it when he observed the girl's white shoulders leaning from the window and saw her bid the driver stop.

In a few strides he had caught up the taxi, the door of which Rinette had opened. He saw her huddled together at the far end of the seat, her eyes staring into the darkness. He read their meaning and sprang in beside her; when he took her in his arms, she crushed her lips to his and now he knew it was no fear or weakness that moved her to surrender, but that she freely gave herself. She was sobbing, sobbing desperately, and murmured broken phrases:

"I want … I want …"

Daniel was dumbfounded by the words that followed:

"I want … to have … a child by you!"

"Same address, sir?" the taxi-driver inquired.

# III

AFTER leaving Jacques and his friends Antoine had the taxi take him to Passy, where he had "a pneumonia case" to visit; thence to his father's residence in the Rue de l'Université, where for the past five years he and his brother had shared the ground-floor flat between them. Lolling in the car that took him homewards, a cigarette between his lips, he decided that his little patient was certainly on the mend, that his day's work was over, and that he was feeling in excellent spirits.

Yesterday, he mused, I wasn't too pleased with myself. As a rule, when expectoration ceases so abruptly … *Pulsus bonus, urina bona, sed cega' moritur*. The essential now is to prevent endocarditis. His mother's still a pretty woman. Paris is looking pretty, too, this evening.

As the car sped by, his eyes searched the green shadows of the Trocadero and he swung round to follow with his gaze a couple turning up a lonely pathway. The Eiffel Tower, the statues on the bridges and the Seine were flushed with rosy light. *In my heart tra-la-la* … The engine purred a ground-bass to his voice. *In my heart … sleeps*, he suddenly added. Got it! *In my heart sleeps la-la-la.* Provoking not to be able to remember the words. Now what the devil sleeps in anybody's heart? The beast in all of us, he thought, smiling to himself. And again his wandering thoughts veered to the prospect of a festive evening at Packmell's. Some girl, perhaps …? He felt glad to be alive, borne on an undercurrent of desire. Throwing away the cigarette, he crossed his legs and drew a deep breath of air, to which the rapid motion of the taxi lent an illusive coolness. Let's hope Belin didn't forget the cupping-glasses for that child. We'll save the poor kid—what's more, without an operation. I'd love to see the look on Loiselle's face. Those surgeons! They're all the rage but—what are they? Mere acrobats. As old man Black used to say: "If I had three sons, I'd say to the least gifted one: 'Go in for midwifery!'; to the most sporting: 'The lancet for you, my boy!'; but, to the cleverest, I'd say: 'Be a general practitioner, treat lots of patients, and try to better your knowledge every day.' " A joyous mood swept over him again; he felt each sinew tense with deep-set joy. "I've played my cards well," he murmured under his breath.

When he reached home, the open door of Jacques's room reminded him that his brother had passed his examination, a success that crowned his five years' vigilance and careful handling of the boy. How well I remember, he mused, the evening when I met Favery in the Rue des Ecoles and the idea of urging Jacques to join the Ecole Normale first came to me! The Square Monge was white with snow. A bit cooler than this! he sighed. Zestfully he foresaw his body under the cool, clear water, and tossed his garments hither and thither with childish impatience.

He felt a new man when he turned off the shower and, thinking of Packmell's, whistled merrily. He accorded but a minor role in his life to "the girls," as he called them; and none to sentimental love. Easy come, easy go, was his method, and he prided himself on its matter-of-factness. Moreover, certain nights excepted, he held aloof from "that sort of thing"—not for discipline's sake or through physical indifference, but because "that sort of thing" belonged to a scheme of life in which the line he had decided once for all to take had no part. He had a feeling that such preoccupations were fit for weaklings, whereas he was a "strong man."

There was a ring at the bell. He glanced at the clock; if it came to that, he would have time to visit a patient before joining the others at Packmell's.

"Who's there?" he called through the door.

"It's I, M. Antoine."

He recognized M. Chasle's voice and opened the door. During M. Thibault's absence at Maisons-Laffitte his secretary continued to work in the Rue de l'Université.

"Ah, there you are!" murmured M. Chasle vaguely. Abashed by the vision of Antoine in his shorts, he looked aside, muttering: "What?" with an interrogative grimace. "I see you're dressing," he added almost immediately, one finger uplifted, as though he had just solved an enigma. "I hope I'm not intruding."

"I have to be off in twenty-five minutes," Antoine made haste to inform him.

"That's more than enough. Look here, doctor." He put down his hat and, taking off his glasses, opened his eyes wide. "Don't you see anything?"

"Where?"

"In my eye?"

"Which eye?"

"This one."

"Keep still. No, I can't see anything at all. You got it in a draught, perhaps?"

"Yes, it must be that. Thank you. I'd opened both windows." He coughed shortly and replaced his spectacles. "Thanks. You've set my mind at rest. That was all; a draught. An airy nothing. Hee! Hee!" He tittered to himself before continuing. "You see, I haven't taken up much of your time." But, instead of reaching for his hat, he perched himself on the arm of a chair and mopped his forehead.

"It's hot," Antoine observed.

"Terribly." M. Chasle knitted his brows with a knowing air. "Thunder about, that's sure. It's hard on people who're bound to keep moving, people who have got steps to take… ."

Antoine, who was lacing up his shoes, glanced at him inquiringly.

" 'Steps to take'?"

"Well, in heat like this! In offices, in police-stations, why, it's stifling! So one just puts it off to another day." He wagged his head with an air of kindly commiseration.

Antoine could make nothing of the rigmarole.

"By the way," said M. Chasle, "I have often wanted to ask you about it; do you know the Superannuates' Home?"

" 'Superannuates' …?"

"Yes. For old people; not incurables. A rest-home at Point-du-Jour; the best air in France. By the by, while we're on that topic, there's something else I'd like your opinion about, M. Antoine. You've never chanced to find a five-franc piece which had been forgotten?"

" 'Forgotten'? How? In a pocket?"

"No. In a garden. In the street, so to say."

Antoine stood up, trousers in hand, and stared at M. Chasle. One can't be a moment with the old blighter, he said to himself, without beginning to feel like a mental case. With an effort he pulled his wits together.

"I don't quite follow your question." He spoke with careful gravity.

"It's like this. Suppose somebody happens to lose something. Well, someone else may happen to find it, the thing that was lost, I mean, eh?"

"Quite."

"Now supposing it happened to be you who found the thing, what would you do with it?"

"I'd try to discover the owner."

"Yes, of course. But supposing the party wasn't there any more?"

"Where?"

"In the garden, in the street, for instance."

"Well, I'd take the—the thing to the police-station."

M. Chasle smiled knowingly.

"But, if it was money? What then? A five-franc piece? We all know what would become of it at the police-station."

"Do you imagine the police would keep the money?"

"To be sure!"

"Not a bit of it, M. Chasle. To begin with, there are the formalities, papers to sign. Look here! Once when I was with a friend in a cab I found a baby's rattle, quite a pretty little thing really, ivory and silver-gilt. Well, at the police-station they took our names—my friend's name, the cabby's, our addresses, and the cab number; we had to sign a form and they gave us an official receipt. That's news to you, eh? What's more, my friend was notified a year later that, as no one had appeared to claim the rattle, he could come and get it."

"Why?"

"That's the law; if lost property is not claimed, the finder is entitled to keep it, after a year and a day."

"A year and a day? The finder?"

"That's so."

M. Chasle shrugged his shoulders.

"A rattle, maybe. But supposing it were a note—a fifty-franc note, for instance?"

"Exactly the same thing."

"I don't believe it, M. Antoine."

"But I'm positive, M. Chasle."

The grey-haired dwarf perched on the chair stared at the young man over his spectacles. Then, averting his eyes, he coughed behind his hand.

"I asked you that—it's about my mother."

"Has your mother found some money?"

"What?" ejaculated M. Chasle, wriggling on the chair-arm. His cheeks were crimson and for a moment his face betrayed an agony of doubt. But almost immediately a subtle smile crept over his lips. "Of course not. I was speaking of the Home." Then, as Antoine began to slip on his coat, he leapt down from the chair to help him pass his arms through the sleeves. "A passage of arms," he tittered. Then, taking advantage of his position at Antoine's back, he continued quickly, speaking into his ear: "The dreadful thing, you see, is that they want nine thousand francs. With the extras, ten thousand francs all told. And *payable in advance*, what's more; it's written down. And then, if anyone wants to leave, eh?"

"To leave?" Antoine faced round, uncomfortably aware that he was losing the thread yet again.

"Good heavens, she won't stay there three weeks! Is it really worth it, do you think? She's getting on for seventy-seven, you see. And it's odds on she won't have time to spend all that at home, ten thousand francs. What do you think?"

"Seventy-seven," Antoine echoed, involuntarily working out the dismal reckoning.

He had lost track of the time. The moment you deflect your attention to other people, he had observed, you find a "case." Despite his professional training, his attention always centred so instinctively on himself that, whenever he directed it to others, he had a feeling of its being deflected. This fool is certainly a case, he said to himself; "the Chasle case." He remembered the time when he first met M. Chasle; on a recommendation from the priests at the boys' school, M. Thibault had engaged him for the holidays as the children's tutor. After their return to Paris, enchanted by the tutor's punctuality, he had given him the post of secretary. For eighteen years, Antoine mused, I've seen the little man day after day and yet I know nothing about him!

"My mother is a splendid woman," M. Chasle continued, avoiding his eyes. "You must not think, M. Antoine, that as a family we're nobodies. I may be one—but Mother, not she! She was born to be a great lady, not to the humble life we lead. Still, as the gentlemen at Saint-Roch so often say, and they've been true friends to us, not forgetting the Cure, who knows M. Thibault by name quite well— 'Every life has its cross,' they say, and it's quite true. It isn't as if I didn't want to do it. I do. If only one could be sure… . Ten thousand francs! … And then I'd have a quiet little life, as I like it! But, there, she wouldn't stay! And they wouldn't give me back the money. They see to that all right. When you go there they make you sign a long rigmarole, with an official stamp on it, a sort of affidavit. Like at your police-station. But they're cannier than your policemen: they don't write to you after a year, they give nothing back. Not a sou," he repeated with a harsh guffaw. Then, in the same tone, he continued: "And your friend—what did he do? Did he go and get it?"

"The ivory rattle? No, he didn't."

M. Chasle seemed to ponder deeply.

"A child's rattle, well, yes… . But money, that's another story. People who lose money in the street are off like a flash to claim it at every police-station in Paris. Shouldn't wonder if some people put in for more than they lost. But what about proving it, eh?"

Antoine did not reply. M. Chasle fixed him with an inquisitorial eye and chuckled. "How about proving it, I'm asking."

"Proving it?" Antoine sounded annoyed. "What about all the particulars they have to specify—how the money was lost, if it was in notes or coin, if-"

"No, not that," M. Chasle broke in excitedly. "They surely wouldn't ask if it was in notes or coin. Details, I grant you. But, anyhow, not that one!" He murmured bemusedly. "No, not that one, most certainly not!"

Antoine glanced at the clock.

"Look here, I don't want to hurry you away but I really must be going."

M. Chasle seemed to waken from a trance and slipped off the chair-arm.

"Many thanks, doctor, for the consultation. I'll go home and put a bandage on … and a wad of cotton-wool in my ear. It'll pass off, I'm sure."

Antoine could not help smiling as he watched the little man hopping warily across the polished hall floor. M. Chasle's shoes always creaked, and this was one of the "crosses" of his life. He had consulted a host of bootmakers, tried every shape of click and upper, every kind of sole— leather, felt, and rubber; he had visited pedicures and even (on tbe advice of a floor-polisher who, on occasion, acted as a waiter) taken his chance with the inventor of an elastic shoe, known as the "Sleuth," specially built for waiters and domestics. But all in vain. Thus he had acquired a habit of walking on tip-toe and, with his beady eyes set in a tiny head and coat-tails flapping on his hips, looked like a wing-clipped magpie.

"There now, I was forgetting!" he exclaimed as he reached the door. "All the shops are shut. Have you any change?"

"For …?"

"For a thousand francs."

"Might have," said Antoine, opening a drawer.

"I don't care to carry such big notes on me," M. Chasle explained. "And, as you happened to speak of people losing money … Could you give me ten hundred-franc notes? Or twenty fifties? The fatter the wad is, the safer, so to speak."

"No, I've only two five-hundreds," Antoine said, making as if to close the drawer.

"Better than nothing," said M. Chasle, approaching him. "Quite different, anyhow." He handed Antoine the note which he had just extracted from the lining of his coat, and was about to slip the other two into the same recess when the door-bell rang so stridently that both men jumped and M. Chasle, who had not yet inserted the money in his cache, stammered: "Wait! Wait a bit!"

His features twitched convulsively when he knew the voice for that of his concierge; the man was hammering on the door and shouting:

"Is M. Chasle there?"

Antoine hastily opened to him.

"Is he there?" the man panted. "It's urgent. An accident. The little girl's been run over."

M. Chasle, who had heard the man's words, staggered, and Antoine returned to the room just in time to catch him as he fell. Laying him on the floor, he fanned his face with a wet towel. The old man opened his eyes and tried to stand up.

"Do come quickly, M. Jules," said the man at the door. "I've a taxi waiting."

"Is she dead?" Antoine asked, without pausing to wonder who the little girl might be.

"As near as may be," the man replied under his breath.

Antoine took from a shelf the first-aid kit which he had handy for such emergencies and, suddenly remembering that he had lent Jacques his bottle of iodine, ran to his brother's room, shouting to the concierge :

"Get him into the taxi! Wait for me! I'll come with you."

When the taxi pulled up near the Tuileries in front of the house in the Rue d'Alger where the Chasles lived, Antoine had pieced together, from the concierge's flustered explanations, an outline of the accident. The victim was a little girl who used to meet "M. Jules" each evening on his way back. Had she tried to cross the Rue de Rivoli on this occasion, as M. Jules was late in coming home? A delivery tri-car had knocked her down and passed over her body. A crowd had gathered and a newspaper-vender who was present had recognized the child by her plaited hair, and furnished her address. She had been carried unconscious to the flat.

M. Chasle, crouching in a corner of the taxi, shed no tears, but each new detail drew from him a racking sob, half muffled by the hand he pressed against his mouth.

A crowd still lingered round the doorway. They made way for M. Chasle, who had to be helped up the stairs as far as the top landing by his two companions. A door stood open at the end of a corridor, down which M. Chasle made his way on stumbling feet. The concierge stood back to let Antoine pass, and touched him on the arm.

"My wife, who's got a head on her shoulders, ran off to fetch the young doctor who dines at the restaurant next door. I hope she found him there."

Antoine nodded approval and followed M. Chasle. They crossed a sort of anteroom, redolent of musty cupboards, then two low rooms with tiled floors; the light was dim and the atmosphere stifling despite the open windows giving on a courtyard. In the further room Antoine had to edge round a circular table where a meal for four was laid on a strip of dingy oilcloth. M. Chasle opened a door and, entering a brightly lit room, stumbled forward with a piteous cry:

"Dédette! Dédette!"

"Now, Jules!" a raucous voice protested.

The first thing Antoine noticed was the lamp which a woman in a pink dressing-gown was lifting with both hands; her ruddy hair, her throat and forehead were flooded with the lamplight. Then he observed the bed on which the light fell, and shadowy forms bending above it. Dregs of the sunset, filtering through the window, merged in the halo of the lamp, and the room was bathed in a half-light where all things took the semblance of a dream. Antoine helped M. Chasle to a chair and approached the bed. A young man wearing pince-nez, with his hat still on, was bending forward and slitting up with a pair of scissors the blood-stained garments of the little girl. Her face, ringed with matted hair, lay buried in the bolster. An old woman on her knees was helping the doctor.

"Is she alive?" Antoine asked.

The doctor turned, looked at him, and hesitated; then mopped his forehead.

"Yes." His tone lacked assurance.

"I was with M. Chasle when he was sent for," Antoine explained, "and I've brought my first-aid kit. I'm Dr. Thibault," he added in a whisper, "house-physician at the Children's Hospital."

The young doctor rose and was about to make way for Antoine.

"Carry on! Carry on!" Antoine drew back a step. "Pulse?"

"Almost imperceptible," the doctor replied, intent once more on his task.

Antoine raised his eyes towards the red-haired young woman, saw the anxiety in her face, and made a suggestion.

"Wouldn't it be best to telephone for an ambulance and have your child taken at once to my hospital?"

"No!" an imperious voice answered him.

Then Antoine descried an old woman standing at the head of the bed—was it the child's grandmother?—and scanning him intently with eyes limpid as water, a peasant's eyes. Her pointed nose and resolute features were half submerged in a vast sea of fat that heaved in billowy folds upon her neck.

"I know we look like paupers," she continued in a resigned tone, "but, believe me, even folk like us would rather die at home in our own beds. Dédette shan't go to the hospital."

"But why not, Madame?" Antoine protested.

She straightened up her back, thrust out her chin, and sadly but sternly rebuked him.

"We prefer not," was all she said.

Antoine tried to catch the eye of the younger woman, but she was busy brushing off the flies that obstinately settled on her glowing cheeks, and seemed of no opinion. He decided to appeal to M. Chasle. The old fellow had fallen on his knees in front of the chair to which Antoine had led him; his head was buried on his folded arms as though to shut out all sights from his eyes, and, from his ears, all sounds. The old lady, who was keenly watching Antoine's movements, guessed his intention and forestalled him.

"Isn't that so, Jules?"

M. Chasle started.

"Yes, Mother."

She looked at him approvingly and her voice grew mothering.

"Don't stay there, Jules. You'd be much better in your room."

A pallid forehead rose into view, eyes tremulous behind their spectacles; then, without a protest, the poor old fellow stood up and tip-toed from the room.

Antoine bit his lips. Meanwhile, pending an occasion further to insist, he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves above the elbows, Then he knelt at the bedside. He seldom took thought without at the same time beginning to take action—such was his incapacity for long deliberation on any issue raised, and such his keenness to be up and doing. The avoidance of mistakes counted less with him than bold decision and prompt activity. Thought, as he used it, was merely the lever that set an act in motion—premature though it might be.

Aided by the doctor and the old woman's trembling hands, he had soon stripped of? the child's clothing; pale, almost grey, her body lay beneath their eyes in its frail nakedness. The impact of the car must have been very violent, for she was covered with bruises, and a black streak crossed her thigh transversely from hip to knee.

"It's the right leg," Antoine's colleague observed. Her right foot was twisted, bent inwards, and the whole leg was spattered with blood and deformed, shorter than the other one.

"Fracture of the femur?" suggested the doctor.

Antoine did not answer. He was thinking. "That's not all," he said to himself; "the shock is too great for that. But what can it be?" He tapped her knee-cap, then ran his fingers slowly up her thigh; suddenly there spurted through an almost imperceptible lesion on the inner side of the thigh, some inches above the knee, a jet of blood.

"That's it," he said.

"The femoral artery!" the other exclaimed.

Antoine rose quickly to his feet. The need to make, unaided, a decision gave him a new access of energy and, as ever when others were present, his sense of power intensified. A surgeon? he speculated. No, we'd never get her alive to the hospital. Then who? I? Why not? And, anyhow, there's no alternative.

"Will you try a ligature?" asked the doctor, piqued by Antoine's silence.

But Antoine did not heed his question. It must be done, he was thinking, and without a moment's delay; it may be too late already, who knows? He threw a quick glance round him. A ligature. What can be used? Let's see. The redheaded girl hasn't a belt; no loops on the curtains. Something elastic. Ah, I have it! In a twinkling he had thrown off his waistcoat and unfastened his braces. Snapping them with a jerk, he knelt down again, made with them a tourniquet, and clamped it tightly round the child's groin.

"Good! Two minutes' breathing-time," he said as he rose. Sweat was pouring down his cheeks. He knew that every eye was fixed on him. "Only an immediate operation," he said decisively, "can save her life. Let's try!"

The others moved away at once from the bed—even the woman with the lamp, even the young doctor, whose face had paled.

Antoine clenched his teeth, his eyes narrowed and grew hard, he seemed to peer into himself. Must keep calm, he mused. A table? That round table I saw, coming in.

"Bring the lamp!" he cried to the young woman, then turned to the doctor. "You there—come with me!" He strode quickly into the next room. Good, he said to himself; here's our operating-theatre. With a quick gesture he cleared the table, stacked the plates in a pile. "That's for my lamp." Like a general in charge of a campaign, he allotted each thing its place. "Now for our little patient." He went back to the bedroom. The doctor and the young woman hung on his every gesture and followed close behind him. Addressing the doctor, he pointed to the child:

"I'll carry her. She's light as a feather. Hold up her leg, you."

As he slipped his arms under the child's back and carried her to the table, she moaned faintly. He took the lamp from the red-haired woman and, removing the shade, stood it on the pile of plates. As he surveyed the scene, a thought came suddenly and went: "I'm a wonderful fellow!" The lamp gleamed like a brazier, reddening the ambient shadow, where only the young woman's glowing cheeks and the doctor's pince-nez showed up as high-lights; its rays fell harshly on the little body, which twitched spasmodically. The swarming flies seemed worked up to frenzy by the oncoming storm. Heat and anxiety brought beads of sweat to Antoine's brow. Would she live through it? he wondered, but some dark force he did not analyse buoyed up his faith; never had he felt so sure of himself.

He seized his bag and, taking out a bottle of chloroform and some gauze, handed the former to the doctor.

"Open it somewhere. On the sideboard. Take off the sewing-machine. Get everything out."

As he turned, holding the bottle, he noticed two dim figures in the dark doorway, the two old women like statues posted there. One, M. Chasle's mother, had great, staring eyes, an owl's eyes; the other was pressing her breast with her clasped hands.

"Go away!" he commanded. They retreated some steps into the shadows of the bedroom, but he pointed to the other end of the flat. "No. Out of the room. That way." They obeyed, crossed the room, vanished without a word.

"Not you!" he cried angrily to the red-haired woman, who was about to follow them.

She turned on her heel and, for a moment, he took stock of her. She had a handsome, rather fleshy face, touched with a certain dignity, it seemed, by grief; an air of calm maturity that pleased him. Poor woman! he could not help thinking… . But I need her!

"You're the child's mother?" he asked.

"No." She shook her head.

"All the better."

As he spoke he had been soaking the gauze and now he swiftly stretched it over the child's nose. "Stand there, and keep this." He handed her the bottle. "When I give the signal, you'll pour some more of it on."

The air grew heavy with the reek of chloroform. The little girl groaned, drew a deep breath or two, grew still.

A last look round. The field was clear; the rest lay with the surgeon's skill. Now that the crucial moment had come, Antoine's anxieties vanished as if by magic. He went to the sideboard where the doctor, holding the bag, was laying on a napkin the last of its contents. "Let's see," he murmured, as though to gain a few seconds' respite. "There's the instrument-box; good. The scalpel, the artery-forceps. A packet of gauze, cotton-wool, that'll do. Alcohol. Caffeine. Tincture of iodine. And so forth… . All's ready. Let's begin." And yet again there came to him that sense of buoyancy, of boundless confidence, of vital energies tautened to breaking-point, and, crowning all, a proud awareness of being lifted high above his workaday self.

Raising his head, he looked his junior for a moment in the eyes. "Have you the nerve?" his eyes seemed to inquire. "It's going to be a tough job. Now for it!"

The young man did not flinch. And now he hung on Antoine's gestures with servile assiduity. Well he knew that in this operation lay their only hope, but never would he have dared to take the risk, alone. With Antoine, however, nothing seemed impossible.

He's not so bad, this young chap, thought Antoine. Lucky for me! Let's see. A basin? No matter—this will do as well. Grasping the bottle of iodine he sluiced his arms up to the elbow with the liquid.

"Your turn!" He passed the bottle to the doctor, who was feverishly polishing the lenses of his pince-nez.

A vivid lightning flash, closely followed by a deafening clap of thunder, lit up the window.

"A bit previous, the applause," Antoine said to himself. "I hadn't even taken up my lancet. The young woman didn't turn a hair. It'll cool things down; good for our nerves. Must be pretty nearly a hundred degrees in this room."

He had laid out a series of compresses round the injured limb, delimiting the operative field. Now he turned towards the young woman.

"A whiff of chloroform. That'll do. Right!"

She obeys orders, he mused, like a soldier under fire. Women! Then, fixing his eyes on the swollen little thigh, he swallowed his saliva and raised the scalpel.

"Here goes!"

With one neat stroke he cut the skin.

"Swab!" he commanded the doctor bending beside him. "What a thin child!" he said to himself. "Well, we'll be there all the sooner. Hallo, there's little Dédette starting snoring! Good! Better be quick about it. Now for the retractors."

"Now, you," he said aloud, and the other let fall the blood-stained swabs of cotton-wool and, grasping the retractors, held the wound open.

Antoine paused a moment. "Good!" he murmured. "My probe? Here it is. In Hunter's canal. The classical ligation; all's well. Zip! Another flash! Must have landed pretty near. On the Louvre. Perhaps on the 'gentlemen at Saint-Roch.' " He felt quite calm—no more anxiety for the child, none for death's imminence—and cheerfully repeated under his breath: "The ligature of the femoral artery in Hunter's canal."

Zip! There goes another! Hardly any rain, either. It's stifling. Artery injured at the site of the fracture; the end of the bone tore it open. Simple as anything. Still she hadn't much blood to spare. He glanced at the little girl's face. Hallo! Better hurry up. Simple as anything— but could be fatal, too. A forceps; right! Another; that will do. Zip! These flashes are getting a bore; cheap effect! I've only plaited silk; must make the best of it. Breaking a tube, he pulled out the skein and made a ligature beside each forceps. Splendid! Almost finished now. The collateral circulation will be quite enough, especially at that age. I'm really wonderful! Can I have missed my vocation? I've all the makings of a surgeon, sure enough; a great surgeon. In the silent interval between two thunder-claps dying into the distance, the sharp metallic click of scissors snipping the loose ends of the silk was audible. Yes; quickness of eye, coolness, energy, dexterity. Suddenly he picked up his ears and his cheeks paled.

"The devil!" he muttered under his breath.

The child had ceased to breathe.

Brushing aside the woman, he tore away the gauze from the unconscious child's face and pressed his ear above her heart. Doctor and young woman waited in suspense, their eyes fixed on Antoine.

"No!" he murmured. "She's breathing still."

He took the child's wrist, but her pulse was so rapid that he did not attempt to count it. "Ouf!" He drew a deep breath, the lines of anxiety deepened on his forehead. The two others felt his gaze pass across their faces, but he did not see them.

He rapped out a brief command.

"You, doctor, remove the forceps, put on a dressing, and then undo the tourniquet. Quickly. You, Madame, get me some note-paper—no, you needn't; I've my note-book." He wiped his hands feverishly with a wad of cotton-wool. "What's the time? Not nine yet. The pharmacist's open. You'll have to hurry."

She stood before him, waiting; her tentative gesture—to wrap the dressing-gown more closely round her body—told him of her reluctance at going thus, half dressed, into the streets, and for the fraction of a second a picture of the opulent form under the garment held his imagination. He scribbled a prescription, signed it. "A two-pint ampoule. As quickly as you can."

"And if—?" she stammered.

"If the pharmacist's shut, ring, and keep on hammering on the door till they open. Be quick!"

She was gone. He followed her with his eyes to make sure she was running, then addressed the doctor.

"We'll try the saline. Not subcutaneously; that's hopeless now. Intravenously. Our last hope." He took two small phials from the sideboard. "You've removed the tourniquet? Right. Give her an injection of camphor to begin with, then the caffeine—only half of it for her, poor kid! Only, for God's sake, be quick about it!"

He went back to the child and took her thin wrist between his fingers; now he could feel nothing more than a vague, restless fluttering. "It's got past counting," he said to himself. And suddenly a feeling of impotence, of sheer despair, swept over him.

"God damn it!" he broke out. "To think it went off perfectly—and it was all no use!"

The child's face became more livid with every second. She was dying. Antoine observed, beside the parted lips, two slender strands of curling hair, lighter than gossamer, that rose and fell; anyhow, she was breathing still.

He watched the doctor giving the injections. Neat with his fingers, he thought, considering his short sight. But we can't save her. Vexation rather than grief possessed him. He had the callousness common to doctors, for whom the sufferings of others count only as so much new experience, or profit, or professional advantage; men to whose fortunes death and pain are frequent ministers.

But then he thought he heard a banging door and ran towards the sound. It was the young woman coming back with quick, lithe steps, trying to conceal her breathlessness. He snatched the parcel from her hands.

"Bring some hot water." He did not even pause to thank her.

"Boiled?"

"No. To warm the solution. Be quick!"

He had hardly opened the parcel when she returned, bringing a steaming saucepan.

"Good! Excellent!" he murmured, but did not look towards her.

No time to lose. In a few seconds he had nipped off the tips of the ampoule and slipped on the rubber tubing. A Swiss barometer in carved wood hung on the wall"- With one hand he unhooked it, while with the other he hung the ampoule on the nail. Then he took the saucepan of hot water, hesitated for the fraction of a second, and looped the rubber tubing round the bottom of it. That'll heat the saline as it flows through, he said to himself. Smart idea, that! He glanced towards the other doctor to see if he had noticed what he had done. At last he came back to the child, lifted her inert arm, and sponged it with iodine. Then, with a stroke of his scalpel, he laid bare the vein, slipped his probe beneath it and inserted the needle.

"It's flowing in all right," he cried. "Take her pulse. I'll stay where I am."

The ten minutes that followed seemed an eternity. No one moved or spoke.

Streaming with sweat, breathing rapidly, with knitted brows, Antoine waited, his gaze riveted on the needle. After a while he glanced up at the ampoule.

"How much gone?"

"Nearly a pint."

"The pulse?"

The doctor silently shook his head.

Five more minutes passed, five minutes more of sickening suspense. Antoine looked up again.

"How much left?"

"Just over half a pint."

"And the pulse?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I'm not sure. I almost think … it's beginning to come back a little."

"Can you count it?"

A pause.

"No."

If only the pulse came back! sighed Antoine. He would have given ten years of his own life to restore life to this little corpse. Wonder what age she is. Seven? And, if I save her,- she'll fall a victim to consumption within the next ten years, living in this hovel. But shall I save her? It's touch and go; her life hangs on a thread. Still—damn it!—I've done all I could. The saline's flowing well. But it's too late. There's nothing more to be done, nothing else to try. We can only wait… . That red-haired girl did her bit. A good-looker. She's not the child's mother; who can she be then? Chasle never breathed a word about all these people. Not his daughter, I imagine. Can't make head or tail of it! And that old woman, putting on airs… . Anyhow, they made themselves scarce, good riddance! Curious how one suddenly gets them in hand. They all knew the sort of man they had to deal with. The strong hand of a masterful man. But it was up to me to bring it off. Shall I now? No, she lost too much blood on the way here. No signs of improvement so far, worse luck! Oh, damn it all!

His gaze fell on the child's pale lips and the two strands of golden hair, rising and falling still. The breathing struck him as a little better. Was he mistaken? Half a minute passed. Her chest seemed to flutter with a faint sigh which slowly died into the air, as though a fragment of her life were passing with it. For a moment Antoine stared at her in perplexity. No, she was breathing still. Nothing to be done but to wait, and keep on waiting.

A minute later she sighed again, more plainly now.

"How much left?"

"The ampoule's almost empty."

"And the pulse? Coming back?"

"Yes."

Antoine drew a deep breath.

"Can you count it?"

The doctor took out his watch, settled his pince-nez, and, after a minute's silence, announced:

"A hundred and forty. A hundred and fifty, perhaps."

"Better than nothing!" The exclamation was involuntary, for Antoine was straining every nerve to withstand the flood of huge relief that surged across his mind. Yet it was not imagination; the improvement was not to be gainsaid. Her breathing was steadier. It was all he could do to stay where he .was; he had a childish longing to sing or whistle. *Better than nothing tra-la-la*—he tried to fit the words to the tune that had been haunting him all day. *In my heart tra-la-la. In my heart sleeps* … Sleeps—sleeps *what*? Got it. *The pale moonlight.*

In my heart sleeps the pale moonlight
Of a lovely summer night …

The cloud of doubt lifted, gave place to radiant joy.

"The child's saved," he murmured. "She's got to be saved!"

… a lovely summer night!

"The ampoule's empty," the doctor announced.

"Capital!"

Just then the child, whom his eyes had never left, gave a slight shudder. Antoine turned almost gaily to the young woman, who, leaning against the sideboard, had been watching the scene with steady eyes for the past quarter of an hour.

"Well, Madame!" he cried with affected gruffness. "Gone to sleep, have we? And how about the hot-water bottle?" He almost smiled at her amazement. "But, my dear lady, nothing could be more obvious. A bottle, piping hot, to warm her little toes!"

A flash of joy lit up her eyes as she hastened from the room.

Then Antoine, with redoubled care and gentleness, bent down and drew out the needle, and with the tips of his fingers applied a compress to the tiny wound. He ran his fingers along the arm from which the hand still hung limp.

"Another injection of camphor, old man, just to make sure; and then we'll have played our last card. Shouldn't wonder," he added under his breath, "if we've pulled it off." Once more that sense of power that was half joy elated him.

The woman came back carrying a jar in her arms. She hesitated, then, as he said nothing, came and stood by the child's feet.

"Not like that!" said Antoine, with the same brusque cheerfulness. "You'll burn her. Give it here. Just imagine my having to show you how to wrap up a hot-water bottle!"

Smiling now, he snatched up a rolled napkin that caught his eye and, flinging the ring onto the sideboard, wrapped the jar in it and pressed it to the child's feet. The red-haired woman watched him, taken aback by the boyish smile that made his face seem so much younger.

"Then she's—saved?" she ventured to ask.

He dared not affirm it as yet.

"I'll tell you in an hour's time." His voice was gruff, but she took his meaning and cast on him a bold, admiring look.

For the third time Antoine asked himself what this handsome girl could be doing in the Chasle household. Then he pointed to the door.

"What about the others?"

A smile hovered on her lips.

"They're waiting."

"Hearten them up a bit. Tell them to go to bed. You too, Madame, you'd better take some rest."

"Oh, as far as I'm concerned …" she murmured, turning to go.

"Let's get the child back to bed," Antoine suggested to his colleague. "The same way as before. Hold up her leg. Take the bolster away; we'd better keep her head down. The next thing is to rig up some sort of a gadget… . That napkin, please, and the string from the parcel. Some sort of extension, you see. Slip the string between the rails; handy things these iron bedsteads. Now for a weight. Anything will do. How about this saucepan? No, the flat-iron there will be better. We've all we need here. Yes, hand it over. Tomorrow we'll improve on it. Meanwhile it will do if we stretch the leg a bit, don't you think so?"

The young doctor did not reply. He gazed at Antoine with spellbound awe—the look that Martha may have given the Saviour when Lazarus rose from the tomb. His lips worked and he stammered timidly:

"May I … shall I arrange your instruments?" The faltered words breathed such a zeal for service and for devotion that Antoine thrilled with the exultation of an acknowledged chief. They were alone. Antoine went up to the younger man and looked him in the eyes.

"You've been splendid, my dear fellow."

The young man gasped. Antoine, who felt even more embarrassed than his colleague, gave him no time to put in a word.

"Now you'd better be off home; it's late. There's no need for two of us here." He hesitated. "We may take it that she's saved,. I think. That's my opinion. However, for safety's safe, I'll stay here for the night, if you'll permit me." The doctor made a vague gesture. "If you permit me, I repeat. For I don't forget that she's your patient. Obviously. I only gave a hand, as there was nothing else for it. That's so, eh? But from tomorrow on I leave her in your hands. They're competent hands and I have no anxiety." As he spoke

he led the doctor towards the door. “Will you look in again towards noon? I’ll come back when I’m done at the hospital and we will decide on the treatment to follow.”

“Sir, it’s … it’s been a privilege for me to … to …”

Never before had Antoine been “sirred” by a colleague, never before been treated with such deference. It went to his head, like generous wine, and unthinkingly he held out both hands towards the young man. But in the nick of time he regained his self-control.

“You’ve got a wrong impression,” he said in a subdued tone. “I’m only a learner, a novice—like you. Like so many others. Like everyone. Groping our way. We do our best—and that’s all there is to it!”

Antoine had looked forward to the young man’s exit with something like impatience. To be alone, perhaps. Yet, when he heard approaching footsteps, the young woman’s, his face lit up.

“Look here, don’t you intend to go to bed?”

“No, doctor.”

He did not press her further.

The little girl moaned, was shaken by a hiccup, expectorated.

“Good girl, Dédette,” he said. “That’s a good girl.” He took her pulse. “A hundred and twenty. Steady improvement.” He looked at the woman, unsmiling. “I think I can say now that we’re out of the wood.”

She did not reply, but he felt she had faith in him. He wanted to talk to her and cast about for an opening.

“You were very plucky,” he said. Then—as was his wont when he felt shy—he went directly to the point. “What are you here, exactly?”

“I? Nothing. I’m not even a friend of theirs. It’s only that I live on the fifth floor, just below.”

“But who is the child’s mother then? I can’t make head or tail of it.”

“Her mother is dead, I think! She was Aline’s sister.”

“Aline?”

“The servant.”

“The old thing with the shaky hands?”

“Yes.”

“So the child’s not in any way related to the Chasles?”

“No. Aline’s bringing up her little niece here—M. Jules pays, of course.”

They spoke in undertones, bending a little towards each other, and Antoine had a nearer view of her lips and cheeks, and the pale beauty of her skin, touched with a curious glamour by fatigue. He felt overtired and restless, at the mercy of every impulse.

The child stirred in her sleep. As they approached the bed together her eyelids fluttered, then closed again.

“Perhaps the light worries her,” the young woman suggested, taking the lamp and placing it further from the bed. Then, returning to the bedside, she wiped the beads of perspiration from the child’s forehead. Antoine followed her movements with his eyes and, as she stooped, he felt a sudden thrill; outlined as in a shadow-play under the flimsy dressing-gown, the young woman’s body was silhouetted, frankly provocative as if she stood naked before him. He held his breath; a dark fire seemed to sear his eyes, watching through misty shadows the languid rise and fall of her bosom, rhythmed to her breath. Antoine’s hands grew suddenly cold as ice, contracted as in a spasm. Never before with such an urgency of passion had he desired another human being.

“Mile. Rachel,” a voice whispered.

She drew herself up.

“It’s Aline; she wants to come and see the child.”

Smiling, she seemed to plead the servant’s cause and, though vexed by the intrusion, he dared not deny her.

“So your name’s Rachel,” he stammered. “Yes, let her come.”

He hardly noticed the old woman kneeling beside the bed. He went to an open window; his temples were throbbing. No cooling breeze came from without; far above the housetops the distant glimmer of a star or two spangled the darkness. Now at length he realized his weariness; he had been on his feet for three or four hours on end. He looked round for a seat. Between the windows two small mattresses resting on the tiled floor formed a sort of couch. Here, no doubt, Dédette usually slept; the room was evidently Aline’s bedroom. He sank onto the pallet, propping his back against the wall, and again an uncontrollable desire swept over him—to see once again, half veiled beneath the tenuous fabric, Rachel’s firm breasts, their rhythmic rise and fall. But she was no longer standing in the light.

“Didn’t the child move her leg?” he inquired without rising. As she walked towards the bed, her body lithely swayed beneath the wrap.

“No.”

Antoine’s lips were parched and he still felt a burning at the sockets of his eyes. How could he lure Rachel out into the lamplight?

“Is she still as pale as she was?”

“A little less.”

“Move her head straight, will you? Quite flat and straight.”

Now she stepped into the zone of light, but only for a moment, as she passed between the lamp and Antoine. The moment sufficed, however, to quicken his desire anew. He had to shut his eyes, jam his back against the wall and thus remain, clenching his teeth, struggling to keep his eyelids closed upon their secret vision. The stench of cities in the summer, a mingled reek of horse-dung, smoke, and dusty asphalt, stifled the air. Flies pattered on the lampshade, hovered on Antoine’s damp cheeks. Now and again thunder rumbled still, above the remoter suburbs.

Little by little, fever, heat and the very urgency of his emotion sapped his powers of resistance. He was unconscious of the slow tide of lethargy advancing; his muscles relaxed, his shoulders settled down against the wall, he fell asleep… .

It was as if a summons, gently insistent, were calling him from sleep and, still on the verge of dreams, he was vaguely aware of a pleasurable feeling. For a long while he hovered in an ecstatic limbo, unable to discover by what channel and at what point on the

surface of his body the warm tide of well-being was seeping in. Presently he traced it to his leg and, at the same moment, grew conscious that someone was seated at his side; that the warmth along his thigh emanated from a living body; that this warmth and the body were Rachel's and the sensation was really one of sensual pleasure, enhanced now that he knew its origin. Her body must have slipped towards him as she slept. He had self-control enough to sit quite still… . Now he was wideawake. All the feelings of his body were centred in a little space, no wider than a hand's breadth, where, across the thin covering of their garments, thigh touched thigh. He stayed thus, motionless, breathing rapidly yet fully lucid, finding in the mingling of his body's warmth with hers a thrill more potent than the subtlest of caresses.

Suddenly Rachel awoke and stretched her arms; drawing away from him, but without haste, she sat up. He made as if he, too, were just awaking, roused by her movement.

"I dozed off," she confessed with a smile.

"So did I."

"It's almost daylight," she murmured as she raised her arms to settle her hair.

Antoine glanced at his watch; it was just on four.

The child lay all but motionless. Aline's hands were clasped, as if in prayer. Antoine went to the bed and drew aside the blankets.

"Not a drop of blood—that's good."

While his eyes followed Rachel's movements, he took the child's pulse; a hundred and ten.

How warm her leg was! he was thinking.

Rachel was examining her reflection in a strip of looking-glass, tacked with three nails to the wall, and smiling. With her shock of red hair, open collar, strong bare arms, and her bold, free-and-easy, slightly scornful air, she might have stood for a heroine of the Revolution, a Marseillaise on the barricades.

"I'm a fine sight!" She pouted at her reflected self, though well aware that the young bloom of her cheeks lost, even in the acid test of waking, nothing of its charm. This was plain to read on Antoine's face as, moving to her side, he peered into the mirror. She noticed that the young man's gaze fastened not on her eyes, but on her lips.

But then Antoine took stock of his own appearance—sleeves rolled up, arms burnt with iodine, his shirt crumpled and stained with blood.

"And to think I was due to dine at Packmell's!" he exclaimed.

A curious smile flickered on Rachel's face.

"Say! So you go to Packmell's sometimes?"

Their eyes were smiling, and Antoine's heart leapt with joy. He knew little of women other than those of easy virtue. Now suddenly Rachel seemed to become less inaccessible to his desire.

"I'll go downstairs to my flat," she said and turned to Aline, who was watching them. "If I can be of any help, don't hesitate to call me."

Then, without bidding Antoine goodbye, she drew the flaps of her dressing-gown together and discreetly made her exit.

No sooner had she gone than he too felt a wish to leave. "A breath of fresh air," he murmured, glancing over the housetops towards the morning sky. "Must go home too, and explain to Jacques. I can return when I've done with the hospital. Washed, presentable. Might have them send for her to help with the dressing. Or shall I look in on my way up? But I don't even know if she's living by herself."

He explained to Aline what to do, should the child wake before his return. Then, just as he was leaving, a scruple held him back; how about M. Chasle?

"His room opens into the hall alongside the stove," the servant explained.

Antoine discovered a cupboard door beside the stove, answering to her description. Opening it, he saw a triangular recess, lit from the far end by a makeshift window let into the party-wall of the staircase. This was the so-called bedroom. M. Chasle lay fully dressed on an iron bedstead, his mouth wide open, placidly snoring.

"Sure enough, the old loon's plugged his ears with cotton-wool!" Antoine exclaimed.

He decided to wait a minute or two, hoping the old fellow would decide to open his eyes. Pious pictures on coloured cardboard mounts lined the walls. Books—devotional, too—filled a whatnot, on whose topmost shelf stood a terrestrial globe, flanked by two rows of empty scent-bottles.

"The Chasle case!" I've a mania for seeing "cases" everywhere, Antoine reflected. Nothing complex about him, really; a second-hand face and a fool's life! Whenever I try to see into people, I distort, exaggerate. Bad habit! That servant-girl at Toulouse, for instance. Now why should I think of her? Because her bedroom window opened onto a staircase, too? No; must be the stale smell of toilet-soap. Funny things, associations of ideas! … He was conscious of a vivid sense of pleasure in recalling that juvenile experience; the chambermaid with whom, when travelling with his father to attend a congress, he had passed a night in an attic room at a hotel. And, at this very minute, he would have given much to possess the buxom maid as he had known her then between the rough sheets of her bed.

M. Chasle went on snoring. Antoine decided not to wait, and returned to the hall.

No sooner had he begun to descend the stairs than he remembered that Rachel occupied the floor below. Coming round the bend of the stairs, he glanced down towards her door; it was open! No other door was visible, so it must be hers. Why was it open?

No time to hesitate; it would seem odd if he halted on the way down. Soon he was on her landing.

Rachel was in the hall of her flat and, hearing footsteps outside, glanced round. Her hair was tidy, she looked neat and cool. The pink dressing-gown had given place to a white kimono. Above its silken whiteness her red hair glowed like the flame upon an altar candle.

He addressed her first:

"*Au revoir*!"

She came to the door. "Won't you come in, doctor, and have something before going out? I've just made some chocolate."

"No, really, thanks—I'm too filthy to come in. *Au revoir*!"

He held out his hand. A smile hovered on her lips, but she did not imitate his gesture.

"*Au revoir*!" he repeated. Smiling still, she still refrained from taking his proffered hand, to his surprise. "You won't shake hands with me then?"

He saw the smile freeze on her lips, her eyes grow set. Then she held out her hand. But, before Antoine could touch it, she had grasped him firmly and, with a brusque movement, drawn him over the threshold. She slammed the door behind them. They stood in the hall facing each other. She had ceased to smile, but her lips were parted still; he saw the white gleam of her teeth. The perfume of her hair drifted towards him and he remembered a naked breast, the warm contact of her limbs. Deliberately, he brought his face near to Rachel's, his eyes bored into hers, grown large in nearness. She did not flinch; he felt, or seemed to feel, her wavering in his embrace and it was she who raised her lips to his mouth's kiss. Then with an effort she drew back from Antoine and stood with lowered head, smiling again.

"A night like that works you up …!" she murmured.

Through an open door at the far end of the passage he had a glimpse of a bed and, all about it, the glimmer of pink silk; under the waxing light the alcove, distant and so near, seemed the great calyx of a flower aglow there in the dawn.

# IV

ON THE same morning, at about half-past eleven, Rachel knocked at the Chasles' door.

"Come in!" a shrill voice answered.

Mme. Chasle was at her wonted place beside the open window of the dining-room. She sat stiffly erect, her feet resting on a hassock, her hands, as usual, unemployed. "I'm ashamed of doing nothing," she sometimes explained, "but there comes a time of life when one can't go on slaving oneself to death for others."

"How is the little girl?" Rachel inquired.

"She woke up, had something to drink, and went to sleep again."

"Is M. Jules in?"

"No, he's out," Mme. Chasle replied with a shrug of resignation.

Rachel felt chagrined.

"All the morning," the old woman lamented, "he's been going on like—like a mosquito! Sunday's such a dreadful day with a man about the place. I hoped this accident would teach him to treat us better. No such luck! The first thing this morning I could see he had something else on his mind, the Lord knows what! Nosing around, and don't I know that way of his? These fifty years now I've had to put up with it anyhow. He left for high mass more than an hour too early. Now that's a queer thing, and no mistake. And he's not back yet. Look there!" Her lips set tight. "There he comes! Talk of the devil … Really, please, Jules," she continued, craning her neck towards her son, who had just tip-toed in, "don't bang the doors like that! Not only because of my heart trouble; there's Dédette as well to think of now— you'll be the death of her."

But M. Chasle showed no contrition; he looked worried and absent-minded.

"Let's go and see how she is," Rachel suggested. No sooner were they at the bedside of the sleeping child than she put a question to him. "Have you known him long—Dr. Thibault, I mean?"

"What?" M. Chasle exclaimed with a look of consternation. Then he began to smile knowingly and, "What?" he murmured again, like an echo. After a pause he brusquely turned towards her as though he had a secret to impart.

"Look here, Mile. Rachel, you've been so kind about Dédette that I'm going to ask a small favour of you. I was so put out by that business that I seem to have lost my head this morning; honestly I must go back there. At once. But it's—it's awkward going back a second time to that office of theirs all by myself. Don't Say no!" he implored. "I give you my word of honour that it won't last more than ten minutes."

Smiling, she assented, though she had no notion what he might mean. She foresaw amusement in humouring the old man's foibles and meant to seize the opportunity of putting further questions concerning Antoine. But all the way he was deaf to her inquiries and did not open his mouth once.

It was well after noon when they reached the police-station. The inspector had just left. M. Chasle seemed so upset by his absence that the police clerk was nettled.

"I can do it for you just as well, you know. What exactly do you want?"

M. Chasle cast a furtive glance towards him and, lacking the courage to draw back, embarked on explanations.

"It's because I've been thinking things over. I want to add something to my statement."

"What statement?"

"I came here this morning—I reported at the other end of the counter, over there."

"What name? I'll turn up the file."

Her curiosity aroused, Rachel came and stood beside M. Chasle. The clerk returned in a moment with some papers; he gave the old man a shrewd look.

"Chasle? Jules-Auguste? That your name? Well, what do you want?"

"It's like this. I fear the inspector didn't quite gather where I found the money."

"In the Rue de Rivoli," the clerk replied, after perusing the record.

M. Chasle smiled as though he had just won a wager.

"You see! No, that's not quite right. I revisited the spot and some details came back which might be helpful, you know; one's got to be quite honest, eh?" He coughed into his hand. "It's this. I can't be quite sure that it was in the street; more likely in the Tuileries. Yes. I was in the garden, you see. I was sitting on a stone bench—the second from the news-stand on the way from the Concorde to the Louvre. I was sitting there with my stick in my hand. You'll see why I lay stress on this point. I saw a gentleman and lady passing in front of me, with a child following. They were talking. I remember saying to myself: 'Well, there's a couple that have managed to set up a family … a child and so forth.' You see, I'm telling you everything. Then, just when he was passing my bench, the child fell down and started crying. I'm not used to handling these delicate situations, so I didn't budge. The child's mother ran up. And then, when they were just in front, almost at my feet—not my fault, was it?—she knelt down to wipe the child's face and took a handkerchief or something of the kind from the little bag she was carrying. I remained seated. Well"—he raised his index finger—"it was after they had gone that, poking about in the sand with my stick, with the ferrule, you know, I happened to see the money. It all came back to me afterwards. I've always kept straight, as people say. This young lady will tell you so. Fifty-two years old and nothing on my conscience; and that's what *tells*, eh? So there's no need to beat about the bush. I've come to think that perhaps the lady with the little bag may have some connexion or other with this business of the money; and I tell you honestly what I think."

"Couldn't you have run after them?" Rachel asked.

"They had gone too far."

The police clerk looked up from his papers..

"Well, can you describe their appearance?"

"I'm not sure about the gentleman. The lady, I know, wore dark clothes; looked thirty or thereabouts. The baby had a steam-engine. Yes, I'm sure about that detail—a little locomotive. Well, when I say 'little' I mean about *that* size. He was dragging it behind him. You're taking it all down?"

"That's all right. Anything more?"

"No."

"Thank you."

Rachel was already near the door. But M. Chasle did not follow her. Leaning on the counter, he stared at the clerk.

"There's another little detail." A deep blush came over his face. "I rather think I made a slight mistake when I handed in the money this morning. Yes." He paused and wiped his brow. "I rather think I made over two notes, didn't I? Yes, yes. I'm sure of it now. That was a little mistake—an oversight, I should say. Because … well, you know … the money I found wasn't exactly that. It was a single note, a thousand-franc note, do you see?" His face was pouring with sweat and once again he passed his handkerchief over his brow. "Make a note of that, now that I remember it—though, in a way, it comes to the same thing, really."

"It doesn't come to the same thing by any means," the clerk replied. "On the contrary, it's an important point. The gentleman who lost a thousand-franc note might have come to us a dozen times but we shouldn't have given him back the two five-hundreds." He stared at M. Chasle disapprovingly. "Look here, have you your identification papers with you?"

M. Chasle fumbled in his pockets.

"No."

"This won't do at all. I regret it, but under the circumstances I cannot let the matter drop. An officer will go with you to your residence and your concierge will have to certify that the name and address you gave are not fictitious."

A mood of resignation seemed to have come over M. Chasle, for, though he continued to mop his face, his expression was serene, almost cheerful.

"Just as you please," he said politely.

Rachel burst out laughing. M. Chasle cast a mournful glance at her; then, after a moment's hesitation, he nerved himself to approach her and address her haltingly.

"Sometimes, Mademoiselle, there lies beneath the plain coat of a mere nobody a nobler heart—and when I say 'nobler' I mean 'more honest,' too—than under the silk lapels of one of the great ones of the earth, for all his name and titles." His underlip quivered; no sooner had he spoken than he regretted the outburst. "I don't mean that for you, Mademoiselle, nor for you, officer," he added, turning without the least timidity towards the policeman who had just entered.

Rachel left M. Chasle and the policeman to their explanations in the concierge's room and went up to her flat.

Antoine was waiting for her on the landing.

She was far from expecting to meet him there and, when she saw him, a sudden thrill of pleasure made her half close her eyes, but hardly showed at all upon her face.

"I rang and rang. I'd almost given up hope," he confessed.

Gaily their glances met and their lips smiled a mutual avowal.

"What are your plans for this morning?" he asked. He was delighted to find her so smart in her summery tailor-made and flower-trimmed hat.

"This morning! But it's after one. And I haven't had lunch yet."

"Nor have I." He came to a sudden decision. "Will you have lunch with me? Say yes!" She smiled, charmed by his eagerness, as of a greedy child who has not learned self-control.

"Say yes!"

"All right then … yes!"

"Good!" he exclaimed. He took a deep breath. She opened the door of her flat.

"Just a moment; I must let my charwoman know, and pack her off home."

As he waited alone outside her door, his emotion of that morning when she had moved towards him came back in all its intensity. "Ah, how she gave me her lips!" he murmured, and was so carried away that he steadied himself with his hand against the wall.

Rachel returned.

"Come along! I'm ravenous!" she cried, with a smile of almost animal eagerness.

"Would you rather go down by yourself?" he ventured awkwardly, "I can join you in the street."

She burst out laughing.

"By myself? Why? I'm quite free and make no secret of anything I do."

They entered the Rue de Rivoli. Once again Antoine observed the easy rhythm of her steps; she seemed to dance along rather than walk.

"Where would you like to go?" he inquired.

"Why not try that place over there? It's getting late, you know." She indicated with her parasol a small restaurant at the street corner.

The room on the mezzanine was empty; small tables were alined in a semicircle beside the windows that opened onto a covered-in arcade and, extending downwards to the sidewalk level, lighted the room from an unusual angle. Here the air was cool, the twilight never varied. They sat down facing each other with the air of two children starting to play a game.

"Why, I don't even know your name!" Antoine suddenly exclaimed.

"Rachel Goepfert. Age: twenty-six. Chin: oval. Nose: medium …"

"And all her teeth?"

"See for yourself!" she laughed, falling upon the sliced sausage in the hors d'oeuvre dish.

"Better be careful. I suspect garlic in it."

"What about it?" she laughed again. "I'm all for anything that's low!"

Goepfert … A Jewess, very likely; and, with the thought, a dusty residue of his upbringing stirred in Antoine's mind, adding a spice of the exotic, a piquant independence to the adventure.

"My father was a Jew," she announced as if she had read the young man's thought.

A white-cuffed waitress brought the menu.

"A mixed grill?" Antoine suggested.

A most unexpected smile, which obviously she was unable to control, lit up Rachel's face.

"What are you smiling at? It's jolly good. A lot of tasty things from the grill—kidneys, bacon, sausages, cutlets …"

"With water-cress and puffed potatoes," the waitress put in as a garnish.

"I know. That'll do for me." The merriment which she had momentarily repressed seemed once again to sparkle in her enigmatic eyes.

"What will you drink?"

"Beer, please."

"So will I. Off the ice."

He watched her nibble the leaves of a tiny raw artichoke.

"I love things with a taste of vinegar," she confessed.

"So do I."

He wanted to resemble her and could hardly refrain from breaking in with a "So do I!" after each remark she made. In all she said and did she was the woman of his dreams. She dressed exactly as he had always wished a woman to dress. A necklace of old amber was round her neck, and the heavy beads hung in long translucent ovals like pulpy fruit, huge Malaga grapes or golden plums aglow with sunlight. Behind the amber her skin took on a milk-white sheen that stirred his senses. Gazing at her, Antoine felt like a starved jungle creature whose raging hunger nothing, nothing could ever quiet. As he recalled their kiss, the pressure of her lips on his, his pulses raced. And here she was, under his eyes—the selfsame Rachel!

Two mugs of foaming beer were set before them. He and she were equally impatient to taste it. Antoine amused himself by timing his gestures with hers, never taking his eyes off her; at the same moment as he felt the soapy, pungent brew lapping his tongue and thawing on it, an icy draught flowed cool on Rachel's tongue—and it was as if their mouths were mingled once again. The emotion left him dazed with pleasure and a minute passed before he caught what she was saying.

"… and those women treat him like a menial."

He pulled himself together.

"What women?"

"His mother and the servant." He realized that Rachel was speaking of the Chasles. "The old woman always addresses him as 'Woolly Head'!"

"Well, you must admit that she's not far out."

"No sooner is he back than she starts badgering him about. Each morning he has to clean their shoes—even the child's shoes—on the landing."

"What, the old boy?" Antoine smiled as he recalled another picture: the worthy Chasle writing to M. Thibault's dictation or solemnly receiving in his employer's stead some colleague from the Institute of Moral Science.

"And they join forces to bleed him dry; why, they even filch the money from his pockets, pretending they're brushing his coat before he leaves. Last year the old woman signed I.O.U.'s for three or four thousand francs, forging her son's signature. The old man nearly fell ill with the shock of it."

"What did he do?"

"Why, he forked up of course. In six months, by installments. He dared not give his mother away."

"And to think we see him every day, yet nothing of that sort ever entered our heads!"

"You've never been to his place before?"

"Never."

"Nowadays their home looks poverty-stricken. But you should have seen how the little flat looked even two years ago; with the tiled floor, the panelling and cupboards, you'd think you were back in the time of Voltaire. Inlaid furniture, family portraits, even some fine old silver plate."

"What's become of it?"

"The two women disposed of it behind his back. One evening when the old man came home the Louis XVI davenport had decamped; another day it was the tapestry, the easy chairs, the miniatures. They even sold the portrait of his grandfather'—a fine figure of a man in uniform, with a cocked hat on his head and a map open in front of him."

"A distinguished soldier, perhaps?"

"Yes, he'd made a name for himself. He saw service under Lafayette in America."

He noticed that she was voluble, but had the knack of expressing herself well. The details she gave had local colour. Obviously she had brains, but, above all, a mental outlook, a gift for noting and remembering facts, that pleased him.

"He never breathes a word of complaint," Antoine remarked, "when he's with us at home."

"No doubt—yet I've come across him time and time again when he'd crept out onto the stairs to hide his tears."

"Well, I'd never have believed it!" he exclaimed, and there was such vivacity in his look and smile that her thoughts veered from her narrative towards the young man himself.

"Are they really so terribly hard up?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it! The two old women are hoarding all the money; they've hidden it away somewhere. And, I assure you, they're lavish enough where they themselves are concerned; but they read him a curtain-lecture if he dares to buy a few gumdrops. The stories I could tell you of what goes on in that flat! Aline wanted—guess what!— to get the old fellow to marry her. Don't laugh! She nearly brought it off, too. The old woman was backing her up. But, luckily enough, one day they fell out."

"And Chasle, did he agree?"

"Oh, he'd have ended by giving in, because of Dédette. That child is all the world to him. When they want to squeeze something out of him they threaten to send her away to Aline's home in Savoie; then he starts crying, and gives way all along the line."

He hardly heard what Rachel was saying; he watched the movements of the mouth that he had kissed—a well-shaped mouth, fleshy at its centre and clean-cut as an incision at the edges. When in repose, the corners of her lips lifted a little, poised in a smile that was not mocking but serene and gay.

So far were his thoughts from the sorrows of M. Chasle that he murmured under his breath: "I'm a lucky chap, you know!" and blushed.

She burst out laughing. Last night beside the operating-table, she had gauged this man's true worth, and now she was enchanted to discover that he was half a child; it brought him nearer to her,

"Since when?" she asked him.

He equivocated.

"Since this morning."

Yet it was true enough. He recalled his feelings when he left .Rachel's place and plunged into the sunlight of the streets; never had he felt in such fine fettle. In front of the Font-Royal, he remembered, the traffic had been dense, but he had launched himself athwart it with amazing coolness, murmuring to himself as he threaded his way through the moving maze of vehicles: "How sure of myself I am, how well I have my energies in hand! And some people tell you there's no free will!"

"Let me help you to a fried mushroom," he suggested.

She answered him in English.

"With pleasure."

"So you speak English?"

"Rather! *Si son vedute cose più straordinarie*."

"Italian, too. How about German?"

"*Aber nicht sehr gut*."

He reflected for a moment. "So you've travelled?"

She repressed a smile. "A bit." There was an enigmatic quality in her voice that made him scan her face intently.

"What was I saying …?" he murmured vaguely.

But their words little mattered—there was a strange telepathy at work, in every look and smile, in their least gestures and their voices.

After a long look at him she exclaimed:

"How different you are today from the man I watched last night!"

"I assure you it's one and the same man." He raised his hands still stained with iodine. "But just now I can show off my surgical abilities on nothing better than a cutlet."

"I had a good look at you last night, you know."

"And what was your impression?"

She was silent.

"Was it the first time you'd witnessed a performance of that kind?"

She stared at him, hesitated, then began to laugh.

"The first time?" she echoed, and her voice implied: I've seen a good many things in my time! But she turned the question adroitly.

"And do *you* have operations like that every day?"

"Never. I don't go in for surgery. I'm a physician, a child-specialist."

"But why aren't you a surgeon? With your ability …"

"I suppose it wasn't my vocation."

They were silent for a moment; her words had conjured up a vague regret.

"Pshaw! A doctor or a surgeon!" he exclaimed. "People have a lot of false ideas about 'vocations.' Men always imagine they have chosen their vocation. But it's circumstances …" She saw his face masked for a moment by the resolute look which had so deeply moved her at the child's bedside. "What's the good," he continued, "of raking up the ashes? The path we have chosen is always the best one, provided it enables us to go ahead." Then suddenly his thoughts returned to the handsome girl seated in front of him and the place that in a few brief hours she had made for herself in his life. A shade of apprehension crossed his face. That's all very fine, he thought, but first of all I must make sure this business won't handicap my work, my future… .

She saw the shadow on his brow.

"You're terribly headstrong, I should say."

He smiled.

"Look here, don't laugh at what I'm going to tell you. For many years my motto was a Latin word, *Stabo*: I will stand firm. I had it stamped on my note-paper and the first pages of my books." He drew forth his watch-chain. "I even had it engraved on this old seal which I still wear."

She examined the pendant he showed her.

"It's very pretty."

"Really? You like it?"

She caught his meaning and handed it back to him.

"No."

But he had already undone the clasp.

"Do, please… ."

"But what's come over you?"

"Rachel. To remind you …"

"Of what?"

"Of everything."

"Everything?" she repeated, her eyes still fixed on his, and laughing heartily.

Adorable she looks just now, he thought. It's charming too, that unrestrained smile of hers, that almost boyish smile. She was as different from the "professionals" he had known as from the girls or married women who had crossed his path in society functions or at holiday resorts, and whom he always found intimidating, seldom attractive. Rachel did not intimidate him; he met her upon an equal footing. She had the pagan charm and even a little of the frankness one finds in harlots who like their calling; but in Rachel that charm had nothing furtive or vulgar about it. How delightful she is! he thought, and saw in her more than an ideal playmate; for the first time in his life he had encountered a woman who might be a friend, a comrade, to him.

The idea had been simmering in his mind all the morning and he had built a castle in the air, a new design of life, in which Rachel had her place. One thing only was lacking: the consent of the other party to the contract. And now he was burning with childish impatience to take her hands and say: "You are the woman I have waited for. I want to have done with casual adventures. But, as I loathe uncertainty, I'd like our mutual relations settled once for all. You shall be my mistress. Let's fix things up accordingly." Now and again he had conveyed a hint of such designs and let fall a word or two touching their future, but always she had seemed to miss his meaning. Knowing her non-committal attitude was deliberate, he hesitated to let her into his plans.

"This is a nice place, isn't it?" she observed, nibbling at a cluster of crystallized red-currants which stained her lips with carmine.

"Yes, it's worth making a note of. In Paris you can find everything, even the atmosphere of a country town." He pointed to the empty tables. "And no risk of meeting anyone."

"Don't you want to be seen with me?"

"Oh, come now! I was thinking about you, of course."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"About me?" That he should find her so mysterious delighted her and she was in no hurry to make things clearer. But his unspoken anxiety was writ so large upon his face that she could not but confess: "As I told you, I'm absolutely on my own. I have enough to live on in a simple way and want nothing more. I am quite free."

His anxious, drawn expression relaxed with frank relief. She guessed the meaning he read into her words: I am yours for the asking. It would have revolted her in any other man, but she had a genuine liking for Antoine. The pleasure of feeling that he desired her outweighed whatever irritation she might feel at his complete misjudgment of her.

Coffee was served. She was silent, lost in thought. For she, too, had not failed to weigh the chances of an understanding between them; indeed she had caught herself thinking only a moment earlier: "I'll get him to shave off that beard!" All the same, he was a stranger to her and, after all, if she felt drawn towards him now, so she had felt to others in the past. He must, she thought, make no mistake about it, must not go on looking at her as he now did with as much complacency as hunger in his eyes.

"A cigarette?"

"No, thanks. I have my own—they're milder."

He held a match to her cigarette. She puffed a cloud of smoke towards him.

"Thanks."

Yes, she mused, the big thing was to avoid all misunderstanding, from the start. She could speak all the more freely because she knew she ran no risk. She moved her cup forward a little, rested her elbows on the tablecloth, her chin on her locked fingers. Her eyelids, puckered with the smoke, almost completely veiled her eyes.

"I say that I am free." She weighed her words. "But that doesn't mean I'm—in the market! You see the point?"

Antoine was wearing his tragic air.

"I must tell you that I've been through the mill, I haven't always had my independence; two years ago I hadn't it. But now I've got it—and I mean to keep it." (She believed she spoke sincerely.) "I set so much store by my freedom that for nothing in the world would I abandon it. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

Now they were silent. He watched her intently. Her eyes were averted; there was the ghost of a smile on her lips as she stirred her coffee.

"What's more—to speak quite frankly—it's not in me to be a real friend to a man, or even his trusted mistress. I like to indulge all my whims—every one of them. And for that you have to be free… . You see what I mean?" With an air of unconcern she raised her cup and drank the coffee in little, scalding sips.

For a moment Antoine felt quite desperate. The bitter end! … But no, there she was still in front of him; the battle was not lost, far from it! To give up anything on which his heart was set was quite beyond him; he had no precedents for failure. Anyhow there was no mistaking how things lay, and that was better than mirage. When one has all the facts, action can be taken. Never for an instant did it cross his mind that she might possibly slip through his fingers or meet his projects for their future with a blank refusal. That was Antoine's way: he never doubted he would gain his end.

The main thing was to get to know her better, to rend the veils that still enveloped her.

"So two years ago you were not free?" His tone was frankly inquisitive. "And are you really free now, now and for the future?"

Rachel looked him all over as if he were a child, while a shade of irony hovered on her face, as though she said: "If I answer, it's only because I choose to do so."

"The man with whom I used to live," she explained, "has settled in the Sudan. He will never return to France." She ended her explanation with a faint, soundless laugh and averted her eyes. Then, as though to close the subject once for all, she rose from her seat.

"Let's go!"

When they were outside she took a street leading to the Rue d'Alger. Antoine walked beside her saying nothing, wondering what to do. He could not bring himself to leave her so soon.

When they had reached the street door, Rachel came to the rescue.

"Will you have a look at Dédette?" she asked. Then, taking herself up, she added: "But what am I thinking of? Very likely you've somewhere else to go."

As a matter of fact Antoine had promised to return to Passy in the afternoon to visit the sick child there. Moreover, he had to go over the proofs of a report that his chief had sent him that morning, asking him to check the references. More important still, he was due to dine that evening at Maisons-Laffitte and meant to keep the appointment; he had firmly resolved to arrive there early so as to have a chat with Jacques before dinner. But all those good resolves went up in smoke, the moment he saw a possibility of staying in Rachel's company.

"I'm free all day," he boldly lied, making way for her to enter.

Qualms for the duties left undone, the upset to his scheme of life, glanced lightly off his conscience. So much the worse for them! … So much the better for me! he all but thought.

They climbed the stairs in silence.

At the door of her flat, as she put her key in the lock, she turned towards him. His features were aglow with candid, undisguised desire; desire untrammeled, jubilant, and not to be frustrated.

# V

JACQUES had rushed home from Packmells at headlong speed. When his concierge informed him that M. Antoine had been called away for an accident, his superstitious fears vanished into air, leaving him vexed with his credulity—that he had thought a passing fancy for a mourning suit could have brought about his brother's death. The absence of the bottle of iodine which he needed for his boil was the last straw; he undressed in the mood of vague but fierce resentment which he knew only too well and always bitterly regretted as unworthy of him. For a long time he could not sleep; he got no joy of his success.

Next morning Antoine met Jacques at the street door, when the latter was just setting out for Maisons-Laffitte, having decided not to await his brother's return. Antoine gave him a rapid account of the past night's happenings, but did not breathe a word about Rachel. His eyes were bright and there was a combative expression on his face which his brother put down to the strain of the operation.

The church-bells were ringing full peal when Jacques left the Maisons-Laffitte station. There was no need to hurry: M. Thibault never missed high mass, nor did Gisèle and Mile, de Waize. He had ample time for a stroll before going to the house. The warm shadows in the park were an invitation to saunter. The avenues were empty. He sat down on a bench. No sounds broke the stillness but the hum of insects in the grass, and the sudden whir of sparrows as, one by one, they left the branches above his head. He sat unmoving, a smile on his lips, thinking of nothing in particular, glad simply to be there.

The ancient domain of Maisons, bordering the forest of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, was bought under the Restoration by Laffitte, who sold off the fifteen hundred acres of the park in parcels, reserving only the château for his use. But the financier saw to it that the dispersion of the estate did not impair the grandiose vistas that radiated from the château, and that damage to the standing timber should be reduced to a minimum. Thanks to his foresight, Maisons remained a vast seigniorial domain; its avenues of lime-trees hundreds of years old offered magnificent approaches to a whole colony of small estates, unwalled and nestling in the woods.

M. Thibault's summer residence lay north-east of the château in a grassy clearing, ringed with white palings and the shade of immemorial trees; in the middle of the greensward a round pond gleamed, set off by shrubberies of box.

Jacques made his way slowly towards this green retreat. As the house came into view in the far distance, he discerned a white dress pressed against the garden gate: Gisèle was looking out for him. Her eyes were fixed on the station road and she did not see him coming. Thrilled with sudden joy, he began to run. Then she saw him and, making a speaking-trumpet of her hands, called to him.

"Passed?"

Though she had turned sixteen, she did not dare to go outside the garden without leave from Mademoiselle.

To tease her, he did not answer. But she read the good news in his eyes and began capering like a child. Then she flung herself into his arms.

"Don't be a silly kid," he growled, more out of habit than anything else. She drew away laughing, but a moment later threw herself once again into his arms, quivering with excitement. He saw her gleeful smile, tears flashing in her eyes; touched and grateful, he held her for a moment closely to his heart.

Laughing still, she lowered her voice.

"I had to make up such a yarn to get Auntie to go with me to low mass; I thought you'd be here at ten, you see. Father isn't back yet. Come along!" She led him towards the house.

Mademoiselle's diminutive figure came into view at the far end of the hall; her back was hunched a little with the years. She hurried forward, her head shaking slightly with excitement. She halted at the edge of the terrace and, as soon as Jacques was near, stretched out her doll-like arms, nearly losing her balance as she kissed him.

"You've passed? Yes?" she mumbled as if she had something in her mouth.

"Whoa!" he gaily implored. "Do mind my boil. It's terribly painful."

"Turn round! Good heavens!" Jacques's small infirmity evidently lay more within her province than examinations at the Ecole Normale, for she asked no more about his success, but led him off to have his neck bathed with boiled water and a soothing compress applied.

The minor operation was just ending in Mademoiselle's room when the gate-bell tinkled. M. Thibault had returned.

"Jacquot's passed!" Gisèle shouted from the window, while Jacques went down to meet his father.

"Ah, there you are! What place?" M. Thibault asked, a quick flush of satisfaction colouring his pasty cheeks.

"Third."

M. Thibault's approval grew even more pronounced. His eyelids did not rise, but the muscles of his nose began to quiver, his glasses dropped to the end of their tether, and he held out his hand.

"Well, well! Not too bad!" he muttered, pressing Jacques's hand between his flabby fingers. He paused a moment, frowning. Then, "How hot it is!" he murmured. He drew his son to him and kissed him. Jacques's heart beat faster. He raised his eyes towards his father, but M. Thibault had already turned away and was hurriedly ascending the terrace steps. He went to his study, dropped his prayerbook on the table, and, taking out his handkerchief, mopped his face.

Lunch was on the table. Gisèle had placed a bunch of marshmallows at Jacques's place and the family table wore a festive air. So blithe was her heart that she could not restrain her laughter. The life she led with the two old people was hard upon her youth, but, such was her vitality, it never weighed on her; with hopes of happiness to come, why not be happy now?

M. Thibault came in, rubbing his hands,

"Well, Jacques," he said, unfolding his napkin and planting his lists on either side of his plate, "now you mustn't rest on your laurels. We're no fools in the family and, as you've entered third, what's to stop you, if you work hard enough, from coming out first

in the finals?" Half closing an eye, he perked up his beard with a knowing air. "For may we not assume that in every competitive examination *someone* must be first?"

Jacques greeted his father's sally with an evasive smile. He was so used to play-acting at the family table that it cost him little effort to carry through his part; occasionally, however, he blamed himself for the habit as lacking dignity.

"To take a first place," M. Thibault continued, "in the finals of such an Alma Mater as the Ecole Normale—your brother will bear me out—stamps a man for life; he is sure of being looked up to in whatever career he chooses. How is your brother?"

"He said he was coming after lunch."

The idea of telling his father that there had been an accident in M. Chasle's household never for an instant crossed Jacques's mind. All who came in contact with M. Thibault were involved in a conspiracy of silence; they had learned how rash it was to give him any kind of information, for there was no knowing what conclusions that burly busybody would draw from even the smallest piece of news, or what steps he might not take, whether by interviews or correspondence, in the exercise of what he deemed his right of meddling in—and muddling—other people's business.

"Have you seen that the morning papers confirm the failure of our Villebeau Co-operative Society?" he inquired of Mademoiselle, though he knew she never opened a newspaper. She answered, nevertheless, with an emphatic nod. M. Thibault emitted a short, brittle laugh; thereafter, till the meal ended, he said no more and seemed indifferent to the others' conversation. Daily he grew more hard of hearing, more isolated from his family. Sometimes throughout a meal he stayed thus—devouring in silence the huge helpings that an appetite worthy of a boxer demanded, and lost in thought. At such moments he was pondering on some complicated scheme, and his inertia was that of a sedulous spider; he was waiting till the tireless workings of his mind had ravelled out some social or administrative problem. Thus, indeed, he had always worked—with eyes half shut, only his brain active, calm as a man of stone. Never had this great worker taken a note, or mapped out the sequence of a speech; everything took form, and was indelibly recorded down to the least detail, behind that brooding forehead.

Mademoiselle sat in front of him, keeping a sharp eye on the servants. Her hands lay folded on the tablecloth, diminutive and comely hands which she kept in condition (a secret, as she thought) with a lotion made of milk of cucumber. She had almost given up eating. For dessert she took a mug of milk and a biscuit only; out of coquetry she never dipped the biscuit in the milk but nibbled it dry with her well-preserved, mouse-like teeth. She was convinced that everyone ate too much, and kept close watch on her niece's plate. Today, however, in honour of Jacques, she waived her principles so far as to suggest, when the meal ended:

"Jacquot, will you try the jam I've been making?"

" 'Delicious flavour, perfectly digestible,' " Jacques murmured, winking at Gisèle, and this standing joke of theirs, calling up a certain packet of bull's-eyes and their screams of laughter as children, set them off laughing as in the past, till the tears came to their eyes.

M. Thibault had not heard the remark, but smiled benevolently.

"You're a bold young scamp!" Mademoiselle protested. "But just look how well they've set." On the dumbwaiter a squad of fifty jam-pots, filled with ruby jelly and protected by a strip of muslin against the flies' offensive, glowed in anticipation of their caps of rum-soaked parchment.

The French windows opened from the dining-room onto a veranda bright with flower-boxes; and sunbeams, slipping past the blinds, streaked the floor with dazzling light. A wasp buzzed round the jar of greengages and, droning under the caress of noonday, set the whole house ahum. Jacques was destined to recall this meal as the only moment when his success in the examination gave him a fleeting thrill of pleasure.

Gisèle was wildly happy and, though habit kept her silent, exchanged clandestine glances with him, as if to share some unspoken secret. At everything Jacques said she broke into a peal of merry laughter.

"Oh, Gise, that mouth of yours!" Mademoiselle twittered; never could she get over the enormity of Gisèle's mouth and her thick lips. No better could she abide the dusky warmth that glowed in the girl's fair skin, her flattish nose, and black, slightly fuzzy hair—all that reminded her only too well of Gisèle's mother, the half-caste, whom Major de Waize had married during his stay in Madagascar. She never missed a pretext for alluding to her niece's forebears on her father's side. "When I was younger," she used to say, "my grandmother—the one with the Scotch shawl, you know—used to make me repeat 'prunes and prisms, prunes and prisms' a hundred times a day, to make my mouth smaller." While she talked she was flicking her napkin at the wasp, trying to catch it, and laughing every time she missed it. There was nothing of the kill-joy about the worthy old creature; her life had been a hard one, but her contagious laugh rang blithe as ever. "Grandmother," she continued, "danced at Toulon with Count de Villele, the cabinet-minister. She'd be dreadfully unhappy if she had to live in these present times, for she couldn't bear the sight of big mouths or big feet." Mademoiselle was very vain of her feet, shaped like a new-born babe's, and always wore blunt-ended cloth shoes to keep her toes from losing their shape.

At three, the hour of vespers, the house became empty. Jacques, left to himself, went up to his bedroom. It was an attic on the top floor, but a large, cool room, gay with a floral wallpaper; the view was restricted, but agreeably so, by the high branches of two chestnut-trees whose feathery leaves formed an attractive foreground.

Dictionaries, a textbook of philology, and the like, still littered the table; he bundled them all away into the bottom of a cupboard, and came back to his desk.

Am I still a child or am I a man? he suddenly wondered. Daniel … but that's another matter altogether. But I—what am I really? He felt a world in himself, a world of warring impulses; a chaos, but a chaos of abundance. Pleased with his private universe, he set his gaze roaming over the expanse of smooth mahogany. Why had he cleared the table? Well, anyhow, he was not short of plans. For how many months had he not been repressing an impulse to set about doing something? "Wait till you've passed," he had admonished himself. And now that liberty deferred was here at last, he could see nothing worthy of his undertaking—not *The Story of Two Young Men*, not *Fires*, nor yet *The Startled Secret.*

He rose from the desk, took a few steps, and glanced towards the shelf where he had been hoarding books (some of them acquired the year before) against the day that set him free. Which of them should be his first choice? he wondered; then, in a fit of petulance, flung himself on the bed, empty-handed.

"Damn all these books and arguments and phrases!" he exclaimed. " 'Words, words, words!' " He stretched his arms out towards some phantom of his mind, intangible; and all but wept. May I now begin to—live? he asked himself perplexedly. And again: Am I a child still, or a man?

His breath came and went in painful gasps; he felt crushed and broken. He could not have said what it was he asked of fate.

"To live!" he repeated. "To act!"

Then, "To love," he added, and closed his eyes… .

He rose an hour later. Had he been in a daydream or asleep? His head was heavy and his neck smarted. Deep exhaustion, due at once to a vague boredom and excess of energy, put any mode of action out of reach and dulled his thoughts. He cast a glance round the room. Must he vegetate for two months in this house? Yet he felt some enigmatic destiny chained him here for the summer, and that elsewhere his plight would be still worse.

Going to the window, he rested his elbows on the sill. And suddenly his anguish lifted. Gisèle's dress gleamed white across the lower branches of the chestnuts and now he knew her nearness would give him back the zest of youth and life.

He had meant to take her unawares, but her ears were on the alert, or else her book had little interest for her, for she swung round at once, hearing Jacques's footstep behind her.

"No luck that time!"

"What's this you're reading?"

She refused to answer and hugged the book to her breast in her folded arms. Their eyes challenged each other with a sudden thrust of pleasure.

"One, two, three …"

He rocked the chair to and fro till she slipped off onto the grass. But she would not let go of her book and he had to grapple with her lithe, warm body for a strenuous minute before he could secure his booty.

"*Le Petit Savoyard*, Vol. I. My word! Are there many more of this?"

"Three volumes."

"Congrats. Is it exciting, anyhow?"

She laughed.

"Why, I can't even get through the Erst volume!"

"Why do you read trash like that?"

"I've no choice, you see."

(After several experiences of the kind Mademoiselle had given her verdict: "Gisèle doesn't care for reading.")

"I'll lend you some books instead," Jacques proposed, pioneer as usual of disobedience and revolt.

But Gisèle did not seem to hear him.

"Don't hurry away," she begged, stretching herself on the grass. "Take my chair. Or lie down here if you like."

He lay down beside her. The sun beat remorselessly on the villa some sixty yards away and on the sanded terrace round it, set with orange-trees in tubs; but here, under cover of the chestnut-trees, the grass was cool.

"So, Jacquot, now you're free." Then in a voice that vainly tried to sound detached, she added: "And what are you going to do next?" She bent in his direction, with eager, parted lips.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, where will you go now that you have two months to do as you like?"

"Nowhere."

"What? You're going to stay-here with us for a bit?" She looked up at him; her eyes were round and glowing with dog-like devotion.

"Yes. I'm going to Touraine on the tenth, for a friend's wedding."

"And then?"

"I'm not sure." He averted his eyes. "I'm thinking of staying at Maisons during my whole vacation."

"Really and truly?" She leaned forward to study Jacques's expression.

He smiled, rejoicing in her joy, and now he viewed with few or no misgivings the prospect of spending two months in the company of this simple, affectionate child whom he loved like a sister—far more than a sister. His presence here had always seemed unwanted and he had never dreamt his coming could bring such radiant happiness to her life; the revelation made him feel so grateful to her that he took the hand lying listless on the grass and stroked it.

"What a nice skin you have, Gisèle! Do you use cucumber lotion, too?"

She laughed and Jacques was impressed by her suppleness as lithely she snuggled up to him. She had the natural, playful sensuality of a young animal and in her full-throated laugh, when it had not a ring of childish glee, sounded an amorous, dove-like cooing. But there was peace between the virgin soul and the ripe, young body, thrilled though it might be by countless vague desires whose meaning she could not guess,

"Auntie still won't let me join the tennis-club this season." She made grimace. "You'll be going there, I suppose?"

"Certainly not."

"Will you go for bicycle rides?"

"Perhaps I will."

"How lovely!" she exclaimed, and her look implied: Wonders will never cease. "You know, Auntie's promised to let me go for rides with you. Would you like that?"

For a moment he peered into the dark pools of her eyes.

"You have pretty eyes, Gisèle."

It seemed to him that they grew darker yet, ruffled by a strange unrest. Smiling still, she turned away. That blithe and laughing charm of hers, the first thing people usually noticed, showed not only in the sparkle of her eyes and the little dimples that played incessantly about the corners of her lips, but also in her ripely moulded cheeks, the blunt tip of her nose, the roguish roundness of her chin—it lit up all her small, plump face, vivid with health and cheerfulness.

She grew uneasy at his evasion of the question she had asked.

"Jacques, you will—won't you?"

"Will what …?"

"Why, take me for bike rides in the woods, or to Marly, like last summer."

She was so delighted to see him smile a vague assent that she wriggled still closer, and kissed him. They lay on their backs, side by side, their eyes exploring the green depths above.

Sounds reached their ears, the tinkle of a fountain, a chuckling chorus of frogs around the pond, and, now and again, voices of passers-by beyond the garden fence. The scent of petunias whose gummy whorls had toasted daylong in the sun slowly drifted from the flower-boxes on the veranda, lingering on the warm air.

"You *are* funny, Jacques. Always thinking! What ever do you think about?"

Propping himself on his elbow, he looked at Gisèle and saw the wonder on her parted, glistening lips.

"I was thinking what pretty teeth you have."

She did not blush, but gave a little shrug.

"No, Jacques, I'm being serious."

Her tone of childish gravity set Jacques laughing.

A bumble-bee, drenched in amber light, hovered round them, blundering like a tiny woolly ball against Jacques's cheek; then, veering earthwards, it dived into a hole in the turf, humming like a threshing-machine.

"I was also thinking, Gise, that you remind me of that bee there."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know." He stretched himself out again on his back. "It's round and black like you and, what's more, its buzz is rather like the noise you make when you laugh."

He made the announcement in such a serious tone that the words seemed to set Gisèle deeply pondering. Both were silent now. The slanting shadows lengthened on the sun-scorched lawn and a level ray caught Gisèle's face. Spangles of gold played on her cheeks, fretting her eyes across the lids; the tickling on her face started her laughing again… .

A chime of the gate-bell announced Antoine's arrival and when Jacques saw his brother at the end of the drive he rose promptly, as though it were all thought out beforehand, and hurried to meet him.

"You're going back this evening?"

"Yes, by the ten-twenty."

Jacques was impressed once again, not by the weariness so evident on Antoine's features, but by their brightness, that gave him an unwonted, almost defiant, air.

He lowered his voice.

"Won't you come with me after dinner to Mme. de Fontanin's?" He knew his brother would demur and, averting his eyes, he added hastily: "I simply must call on them and I'd hate to have to go there alone tomorrow."

"Will Daniel be there?"

Jacques knew for a fact that he would not.

"Of course," he said.

M. Thibault appeared at a window of the drawing-room, holding an open newspaper, and they ceased speaking.

"Ah, there you are!" he called to Antoine. "I am glad you were able to come." He always spoke to Antoine with studied courtesy. "Stay where you are; I'll join you."

"That's fixed up then?" Jacques whispered. "We can say we're going for a stroll after dinner."

M. Thibault had never withdrawn the veto he had pronounced long ago against any revival of Jacques's relations with the Fontanins. For safety's sake the hated name was never mentioned in his hearing. Was he unaware that for some time past his injunction had been disregarded? Impossible to be sure. So blind was his paternal pride, it well might be that the notion his orders were being persistently disobeyed never crossed his mind.

"Well, he's passed," said M. Thibault, descending with heavy tread the terrace steps, "so now we need feel no more anxiety about his future." Then, as an afterthought: "Shall we take a stroll round the lawn before dinner?" The unusual proposal called for explanation. "I want to have a talk with you both. But, first of all"—he turned towards Antoine—"have you seen the evening papers? What do they say of the Villebeau bankruptcy? Have you seen anything about it?"

"Your Workmen's Co-operative Society?"

"Yes, my dear boy. An absolute disaster—with a scandal behind it, too! Quick work, eh?" He emitted a short laugh that sounded like a cough.

Ah, how she gave me her lips! Antoine was thinking, and a picture of the restaurant rose before his eyes: Rachel sitting opposite him, the light welling up from below—as on a stage—from windows that extended to the sidewalk. … I wonder why she laughed like that when I suggested a mixed grill!

He tried his best to be interested in his father's conversation. Moreover, it puzzled him that M. Thibault should take this "disaster" so calmly, for the philanthropist was a member of the group that had supplied the Villebeau button-makers with funds when, after the last stroke, they had founded a co-operative workers' union to demonstrate that they could do without their employers.

M. Thibault had reached his peroration.

"In my opinion the money was not spent in vain. We have no reason to regret our conduct; we took the workers' Utopian projects seriously and volunteered to assist them with our capital. With this result: the enterprise went bankrupt in less than eighteen months. As it happens, the middleman between the workmen's delegates and ourselves did his work well. He's an old acquaintance of yours, by the by." He halted and turned to Jacques. "It's Faîsme, who was at Crouy in your time."

Jacques made no comment.

"He has a hold on all the men's leaders, thanks to the letters those noble souls addressed us, asking for funds—letters penned during the worst phase of the strike. So none of them can think of climbing down." He emitted another little cough of self-satisfaction. "But that is not what I wish to consult you about," he added, moving forward again.

He walked with heavy steps and flagging breath, trailing his feet in the sand, with his body bent forward and hands behind his back; his unbuttoned coat flapped loosely round him. His two sons walked beside him. Jacques recalled a sentence he had read, though he could not place it: "Whenever I meet two men walking side by side and finding nothing to say to each other, I know them for father and son."

"It's this," said M. Thibault. "I want your opinion on a plan I have in mind—on your behalf." They heard a note of sadness, and a ring of sincerity in his voice, quite other than his usual tone. "You will find out, my sons, when you attain my age, that a man cannot but look back and ask himself: What will remain of my life's work? I know very well—Abbé Vécard has often told me so—that all our efforts spent on doing good work together to the same end are cumulative. Still—is it not cruel to think that all the strivings of a life may be utterly obliterated in the nameless jetsam each generation leaves behind? May not a father legitimately desire that his own children will keep some personal memory of him? … If only by way of an example to others?" He sighed. "I can honestly say that I have your interests at heart, rather than mine. It has struck me that in future years you, as my sons, will prefer not to be confounded with all the other Thibaults in France. We have two centuries behind us—as commoners, if you like; but we can prove who we are. That, anyhow, is something. And I believe that, to the best of my ability, I have added to this worthy heritage, and have the right—this will be my reward—to hope there may be no misunderstanding as to your parentage, and to desire that you may bear my name in its entirety and transmit it intact to those who will be born of my blood. It lies with the Heralds' College to deal with such requests. So, some months ago, I took the requisite steps to have a formal alteration of your names recorded; I expect very shortly to receive the deed-polls, which I shall ask you to sign. And, by the end of the vacation, I trust—in any case, not later than Christmas—each of you will have the legal right to call himself no longer just plain 'Thibault,' but 'Oscar-Thibault' with a hyphen; 'Dr. Antoine Oscar-Thibault,' for example." Bringing his hands in front of him, he rubbed them together. "That is what I wanted to tell you. No thanks, if you please; we will not mention it again. And now to dinner; I see Mademoiselle beckoning." He laid a patriarchal arm around the shoulder of each of his sons. "If it so happens that this distinction helps you on in life, so much the better, my sons. Surely, in all conscience, it is only justice that a man whose heart was never set on worldly gain should endow his heirs with such prestige as he has himself acquired."

There was a tremor in his voice and, to hide his emotion, he swerved from the path along which they were walking and hurried on by himself, stumbling over the hummocks, towards the house. Never before had Antoine and Jacques seen their father so profoundly moved.

"Well, that beats everything!" Antoine chuckled.

"Oh, don't, Antoine!" It seemed to Jacques that dirty hands, his brother's, were pawing at his heart. Jacques rarely spoke of his father without a certain deference; he declined to judge him, and deplored his own clear-sightedness when (oftener than he would have wished) his father was its target. And tonight the agony of doubt that lay behind his father's longing for survival had touched him deeply, for even Jacques, though only twenty, could never think of death without a sinking of the heart.

Why ever did I get Antoine to come? Jacques asked himself as, an hour later, he accompanied his brother down the green avenue, flanked by centenarian lime-trees, that led from the château to the forest. His neck was smarting; Mademoiselle had insisted on having the boil inspected by Antoine, who had thought fit to lance it, despite his victim's protest-—for the idea of paying a visit with a bandage on his neck did not at all appeal to him.

Antoine was tired but talkative; his thoughts were all for Rachel. Yesterday at this hour he did not know her yet, and now she filled every moment of his life.

His exuberance contrasted with his brother's mood; Jacques had passed a restful day and now, as he walked on, his thoughts were busy with a visit whose prospect stirred in him a fugitive emotion, sometimes akin to hope. He felt dissatisfied and mistrustful as he walked at Antoine's side. Some cautionary instinct warned him against his brother, setting a wall of silence between them, though their conversation was cordial as ever. But in reality each was building up a screen of words and smiles, like hostile forces tossing up clods of earth to make a barrier against attack. Neither was hoodwinked by the other's strategy. The tie of blood linked them so intimately that nothing of importance could remain a secret between them. The very tone of Antoine's voice as he praised the fragrance of a late-flowering lime—it had called up a secret memory of Rachel's scented hair—if it did not tell Jacques everything, was all but tantamount to a confession. So he was little surprised when Antoine, yielding to his obsession, caught his arm and, setting a faster pace, launched forth into an account of his eventful night, and of its aftermath. Antoine's tone, his grown-up air, taken with certain broad details little in keeping with his normal, elder-brotherly reserve, made Jacques feel strangely ill at ease. He put a good face on it, smiled and nodded his approval —but he was distressed. He was angry with his brother for causing this distress, and even for the sentiment of disapproval which accompanied it. The more his brother hinted at the state of rapture in which he had been living for the past twelve hours, the more Jacques shrank back into his shell of cold disdain and felt the thirst for chastity grow strong within him. When Antoine, describing his afternoon, ventured to use the words "a day of love," Jacques was profoundly shocked, and showed it.

"No, Antoine," he protested, "no, and no again! 'Love'—that's something quite different."

A rather self-complacent smile hovered on Antoine's lips; but he was taken aback for all that, and said no more.

The Fontanins were living in an old house, left them by Mme. de Fontanin's mother, at the far end of the park on the outskirts of the forest. The house abutted on the old park wall. A road, lined with acacias and so seldom used that patches of rank grass were growing on it, led from the main avenue to a postern gate let into the garden wall.

Night was falling when they arrived, and lights shone in some of the windows. A bell tinkled and, at the bottom of the garden beside the house, Puce, Jenny's dog, began to bark. Antoine and Jacques knew where to find them. After meals the Fontanins resorted to the far side of the house where, shaded by two plane-trees, a natural terrace overhung the ancient fosse. A car had pulled up in the drive and they had to grope their way around it.

"Visitors!" Jacques murmured, and suddenly regretted he had come.

But Mme. de Fontanin was already on her way to meet them.

"I knew it was you!" she exclaimed as soon as she saw their faces. She hastened towards them with brisk, glad steps, holding out her hands and smiling her greetings. "We were ever so pleased this morning when Daniel's wire came." Jacques did not flinch. "But I *knew* you would pass," she continued, looking earnestly at Jacques. "Something told me so that Sunday in June when you came here with Daniel. Dear Daniel, how delighted, how proud he must feel! Jenny was delighted, too."

"So Daniel isn't here tonight?" Antoine remarked.

As they neared the circle of chairs, they heard a sound of gay voices. Jacques singled out at once a certain voice with a distinctive quality of its own, vibrant yet subdued: Jenny's voice. She was seated beside another girl, her cousin Nicole, and a man some thirty years of age towards whom Antoine advanced with an air of surprise—a young surgeon who had been his colleague at the Necker Hospital. The two men shook hands cordially.

Mme. de Fontanin beamed. "So you know each other. Antoine and Jacques Thibault are great friends of Daniel's," she explained to Dr. Hequét. "So you won't mind letting them into the secret, will you?" She turned to Antoine. "I'm sure my little Nicole will let me tell you about her engagement—won't you, darling? It's not really quite official yet, but, as you see, Nicole's already brought her fiance here to meet her aunt, and you need only look at them to guess their secret."

Jenny had not gone to meet the brothers and did not rise till they were actually standing before her; she shook hands with them coldly.

"Nico dear, come and see my pigeons," she said to Nicole before they had time to sit down again. "I've eight baby pigeons who are …"

"Still on the bottle," Jacques broke in; his voice, which he meant to sound insolent, was merely ill-mannered and out of place. This he realized at once, and clenched his teeth.

Jenny did not seem to hear.

"… who are just learning to fly," she continued smoothly.

"But they're all in bed by now," Mme. de Fontanin protested, to keep her from going.

"So much the better. You can't get near them in the daytime. Will you come too, Felix?"

Dr. Hequét, who was talking to Antoine, hastened to follow the two girls.

As soon as the engaged couple was out of earshot Mme. de Fontanin bent towards Antoine and Jacques.

"It's a most fascinating little match, you know. Our little Nicole has no means of her own and she was quite set against being on anyone's hands. So for three years she's been earning her living as a nurse. And now, just see how she has been rewarded! Dr. Hequét met her at the bedside of a patient and was so impressed by her devotion and intelligence, and the plucky way she was facing life, that he fell in love with her. There's the whole story. Now don't you think it's perfectly charming?"

The romantic glamour of her tale, where virtue triumphed and every sentiment was lofty, enchanted her simple soul, and the light of faith shone in her eyes. Most of her remarks were addressed to Antoine and she spoke to him in a cordial manner that seemed to imply they saw eye to eye in everything. She liked his forehead and keen gaze, never reflecting that he was sixteen years her junior; that she might, or almost might, have been his mother. She was overjoyed when he assured her Felix Hequét was a first-rate surgeon with a great future before him.

Jacques took no part in the conversation. "On the bottle"! He was furious with himself. Everything, even Mme. de Fontanin's effusive amiability, had been ruffling his nerves ever since he came. He had not been able to hear her congratulations out, but turned away, feeling ashamed on her account—that she should seem to attach any importance to his success, the news of which, however, he had been at pains to telegraph to her. "Jenny at least spared me her compliments," he murmured to himself. "Did she realize that I am capable of better things? I wonder. No. Just indifference. Better things! 'Still on the bottle'! I wonder if she even knows what the Ecole Normale means. Anyhow, what does she care about my future? She hardly said 'Good evening' to me. But how about me? Why did I make that idiotic remark?" He blushed, gritting his teeth again. "And while she said 'Good evening' she went on listening to her cousin. Her eyes—inscrutable, they are. The rest of her face is almost childish, but her eyes …!" At every moment painful twinges were reminding him of his boil, but he resented still more the bandage that all of them— not only Mademoiselle but Gisèle too—had foisted on him. A hideous sight he must be looking!

Antoine was talking cheerfully, paying no heed to Jacques.

"… and from the moral point of view …" he was saying.

When Antoine talks, Jacques thought, there's no room for anybody else. Then suddenly his brother's easy manners in society and that "moral point of view," following as it did avowals of a very different order, disgusted him as a piece of unforgivable hypocrisy. How different from him his brother was! Rushing to extremes, Jacques decided that he had not a single thing in common with Antoine. Sooner or later their ways would part, inevitably; their different bents were incompatible and had no point of contact. A mood of utter hopelessness came over him; even their five years of close communion, he realized, had failed to make them proof against this coming estrangement, could not prevent them from growing indifferent to each other, strangers, or even enemies! He all but rose, snatching at any pretext for escape. Ah, could he but wander away alone into the darkness, out into the forest, anywhere! One human being had smiled her way into his heart: little Gisèle. Yesterday's success—how gladly would he forgo it, could he but be with her again at this very moment, lying on the grass, watching her face and eyes—so unmysterious, hers!—and hear her cry: "You will, won't you?" with that cooing laugh of hers! Now that he thought of it, never had he seen Jenny laugh; even her smile seemed disillusioned. What ever has come over me? he wondered and tried to pull himself together. But the dark mood was stronger than his will, a bitter nausea filling him with loathing for everything and everybody, for Mme. de Fontanin's remarks, Antoine's degradation, people in general, his own wasted youth, the world at large—yes, and for Jenny too, who seemed so much at home in a world of futility.

"What are your plans for the vacation?" Mme. de Fontanin inquired. "Couldn't you induce Daniel to spend a few weeks away from Paris? It would be so nice for you both and would benefit you in other ways." She was discovering with some dismay that the brilliant career on which she had hoped to see her son embark was slow to shape itself and, for all her reluctance to linger on such thoughts, she was sometimes worried by the life he led; it was too free, too easy-going and—though she shirked the thought—too dissipated.

When Jacques told her that he intended to stay at Maisons, she was delighted.

"That's splendid! I hope you'll persuade Daniel to go out a bit; he never will take a holiday and I'm so afraid he will make himself ill. Jenny!" She had noticed the girl returning with her friends. "Good news! Jacques will be here all summer. That will mean some good tennis, won't it? Jenny's simply mad about tennis this summer; she spends all her mornings at the club. Our local tennis-club is quite famous in its way," she explained to Dr. Hequét, who had taken the chair beside her. "Such nice young people! They all turn up there every morning. The courts are excellent and they're always arranging matches, tournaments, and that sort of thing. I don't know much about it," she added with a smile, "but it's terribly exciting, they tell me. And they're always grumbling about the shortage of men. Are you still a member, Jacques?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Nicole, you must bring Dr. Hequét and stay a week or ten days with us this summer. That will be nice, won't it, Jenny? I'm sure Dr. Hequét is a good player, too."

Jacques turned towards Hequét. The drawing-room lamp shone through the open window, showing up the young surgeon's lean, austere face, his close-cropped brown beard and temples prematurely streaked with silver. He certainly looked ten years older than Nicole. The lamplight, glinting on his glasses, masked the expression of his eyes, but his thoughtful air was decidedly engaging. Yes, thought Jacques, *there* is a man—and I am only a child! A man who can inspire love. Whereas I …

Antoine had risen from his chair. He felt tired and did not want to miss his train. Jacques cast him an angry look. Though a few minutes before he himself had been in half a mind to snatch at any pretext for departure, now he could not bring himself to end the evening thus. Still, he would have to leave at the same time as his brother.

He moved towards Jenny.

"Whom are you playing tennis with at the club this summer?"

She looked at him, and the slender line of her eyebrows knitted a little.

"With anyone who happens to be there," she replied.

"Meaning the two Casins, and Fauquet, and the Perigault crowd?"

"Naturally."

"They're just the same, I suppose, and as witty as ever?"

"What about it? We can't all be shining lights at the Ecole Normale!"

"Yes, I dare say one has to be a bit of a fool to play tennis properly."

"Very likely." She threw him an aggressive look. "Anyhow, you should know about that; you used to be pretty good at tennis once." Then, ostentatiously breaking off their conversation, she turned to her cousin. "You're not going yet, Nicole darling, I hope."

"Ask Felix."

"What's this you're to ask Felix?" said Dr. Hequét, who had approached the two girls.

Antoine's eyes were fixed on Nicole; yes, he mused, the girl certainly has a dazzling complexion. But, beside Rachel's …! And suddenly his heart beat faster.

"So, Jacques, we'll be seeing you again quite soon?" said Mme. de Fontanin. "Are you going to play tomorrow, Jenny?"

"I don't know, Mamma—I hardly think so."

"Well, if it isn't tomorrow, you're bound to meet there one morning," Mme. de Fontanin continued in a conciliatory tone. And, despite Antoine's protest, she insisted on escorting the two young men to the gate.

"I must say, darling, you weren't very nice to your friends!" Nicole exclaimed as soon as the Thibaults were out of earshot.

"To begin with, they're not my friends," Jenny replied.

"I've worked with Thibault," Hequét observed. "He's a first-rate man and has already made his mark. I've no ideas about his brother but"—behind the glasses his grey eyes twinkled quizzingly, for he had overheard the short passage between Jacques and Jenny—"it's rather rare for a duffer to get through the Normale exam at his first shot, and take a high place, too."

A deep blush mantled Jenny's cheeks, and Nicole came to her rescue. She had lived with the Fontanins long enough to learn the kinks in Jenny's character, one of which was her shyness always at issue with her pride, and sometimes lapsing into a morbid readiness to take offence.

"The poor boy had a boil on his neck," she put in good-naturedly, "and that doesn't help a man to be his social best."

Jenny made no comment, and Hequét did not insist. He turned to Nicole.

"We must be getting ready now, dear." His tone was that of a man who always runs his life by clockwork.

Mme. de Fontanin's return was the signal for a general move. Jenny went with her cousin to the bedroom where she had left her coat. Some minutes passed before she spoke.

"So there's my summer spoilt, absolutely ruined!"

Seated before the mirror, Nicole was tidying her hair for the sole benefit of her fiance. She felt that she was looking her best, wondered what he was saying to her aunt downstairs, and pictured the long drive home in her lover's car across the silent night. So she paid little heed to Jenny's ill-humour. Noticing the sullen look on her friend's face, she merely smiled.

"What an infant you are!"

She did not see the look that Jenny flung her.

A motor-horn sounded and Nicole swung round gaily and darted towards her cousin to embrace her, with the mixture of affection, innocence, and coquetry that made her so attractive. But Jenny, uttering an involuntary cry, swerved out of her reach. She shrank from being touched by anybody and had always refused to learn to dance, so physically repugnant to her was the contact of another's arm. Once, in early childhood, she had sprained her ankle in the Luxembourg and had to be taken home in a carriage; she had preferred to climb the stairs, trailing an injured limb, to letting the concierge carry her in his arms up to their landing.

"What a touch-me-not you are!" laughed Nicole. Then, with a cheerful glance at her cousin, she changed the subject, returning to their conversation before dinner in the rose-alley. "I'm ever so glad to have had my talk with you, darling. Some days I'm positively oppressed by my happiness. With you of course I'm always perfectly sincere—just myself, my real self, exactly as I am. Oh, how I hope, darling, it won't be long before you, too …"

Under the headlights the garden had the glamour of a stage, set for a gala night. Hequét had raised the hood of his car and was tightening a plug with the measured gestures of a skilled surgeon. Nicole suggested keeping her coat folded on her knees but he insisted on her wearing it. He treated her like a little girl for whom he was responsible. Did he treat all women thus—like children? But Nicole gave in with a good grace that startled Jenny and roused in her a vague resentment towards the engaged couple. "No," she said to herself, with a shake of her head; "that sort of happiness … not for me, thanks!" For a long while her eyes followed the flail of light that swept the trees before the receding car. Leaning against the garden wall, with Puce clasped in her arms, she felt such hopeless hope, such bitterness against she knew not what, that, lifting her eyes towards the star-strewn spaces, she wished for an instant or two that she might die thus, before attempting life's adventure.

# VI

GISÈLE was wondering why for some days past the daylight hours had seemed so short, summer so glorious, and why each morning as she dressed before her open window she could not help singing, smiling at everything—her mirror, the cloudless sky, the garden, the sweet peas she watered on her windowsill, the orange trees on the terrace, which seemed to be curling themselves into balls, like hedgehogs, the better to screen themselves from the far-darting sun.

M. Thibault rarely spent more than two or three days at Maisons-Laffitte without making a business trip to Paris, where he stayed overnight. When he was away, a brisker air seemed to pervade the house. Meals came and went like games, and Jacques and Gisèle once more gave free vent to their bursts of childish glee. Mademoiselle, in gayer mood, pattered from pantry to linen-closet, from kitchen to drying-room, lilting antiquated hyms that sounded like bygone music-hall refrains. On such occasions Jacques felt unconstrained, his brain alert and full of warring projects, and gave himself wholeheartedly to his vocation. He spent the afternoons in a corner of the garden, getting up, sitting down again, scribbling in his note-book. Gisèle, too, infected by a desire to turn her leisure hours to good account, posted herself on a landing whence she could watch Jacques coming and going beneath the trees and, immersed in Dickens's *Great Expectation*s—Mademoiselle, on Jacques's suggestion, had sanctioned its perusal as being "good for Gisèle's English"—wept ecstatically for having guessed from the outset that Pip would give poor Biddy up for the exotic charms of cruel Miss Estella.

Jacques's brief absence in the second week of August to attend Battaincourt's wedding in Touraine—he had not dared to stand out against his friend's request—sufficed to break the spell.

The day after his return to Maisons he awoke too early after a restless night; shaving warily, he noticed that his cheeks were innocent of rash and the boil had given place to an invisible scar, and now the prospect of resuming this too uniform existence seemed so exasperating that he suddenly stopped dressing and threw himself upon his bed. The weeks are passing, passing, he thought. Could this be the vacation to which he had looked forward so? He sprang up from the bed. "Exercise is what I need," he murmured in a cool voice that assorted ill with his fevered gestures. He took a tennis-shirt from the wardrobe, saw that his white shoes and racket were in order, and a few minutes later jumped on his bicycle and was off post-haste to the tennis-club.

Two courts were in play; Jenny was one of the players. She did not seem to notice Jacques's arrival and he made no haste to greet her. A new toss-up brought them into the same four; first against each other, then as partners. As players, there was little to choose between them.

No sooner were they together than they dropped back into their old-time unmannerliness. True, Jacques paid ample attention to Jenny, but always in an irritating, not to say offensive way; he jeered at her bad shots and obviously enjoyed contradicting her. Jenny gave him tit for tat, in a shrill voice that was quite unlike her. She could easily have replaced him by a less churlish partner, but apparently did not want to do so; on the contrary she seemed set on having the last word. When it was lunch-time and the players began to disperse she challenged Jacques in a voice that had lost nothing of its hostility:

"Play four up with me!"

The energy she put into her play was so intense, so combative, that she beat Jacques four-love.

The victory made her generous.

"There's nothing in it, you know; you're out of training. One of these days you'll have your revenge."

Her voice had once again the soft, brooding tone that was natural to her. We're just two kids, Jacques thought. It pleased him that they shared a failing and he seemed to see a gleam of hope. A wave of shame traversed his mind when he recalled his attitude to Jenny, but when he asked himself what other to adopt he found no answer. There was no one with whom he longed so keenly to be natural; yet in her company he found it utterly impossible.

Noon was striking when they left the club together, wheeling their bicycles.

"*Au revoir*," she said. "Don't wait for me. I'm so hot that I might catch a chill if I started riding now."

Without replying, he continued walking at her side.

Jenny disliked the clinging type of person; to be unable to dislodge a companion at the moment of her choice always annoyed her. Jacques had no idea of this; he meant to return for another game next day and cast about for a pretext to justify this sudden assiduity.

"Now that I'm back from Touraine …" he began awkwardly. The tone of mockery had left his voice. Last year she had noticed the same thing; when they were alone, he dropped his teasing ways.

"So you were in Touraine," she repeated, for want of anything better to say.

"Yes. A friend's wedding. But of course you know him; I met him at your place—Battaincourt."

"Simon de Battaincourt?" Her tone implied that she was piecing together her memories of him. She summed them up bluntly. "Ah, yes—I didn't like him."

"Why not?"

She resented being cross-examined in this fashion.

"You're too hard on him," Jacques continued, seeing she would not answer. "He's a good sort." Then he thought better of it. "No, you're right, really; there's nothing much in him." She vouchsafed an approving nod which delighted him.

"I didn't know you were so attached to him," she observed.

"Hardly that," Jacques smiled. "He attached himself to me. It happened on our way back from some show or other. It was very late and Daniel had deserted us. Without a word of warning, Battaincourt launched out into a plenary confession. The way he unloaded his life-story on me made me think of a fellow handing his money over to a banker: 'Look after my capital; I put myself-in your hands!' "

Jacques's description interested her up to a point and, for the moment, she ceased wishing to shake him off.

"Do many people confide in you?"

"No. Why should they? … Well, perhaps they do." He smiled. "Yes, as a matter of fact, quite often. Does that surprise you?" There was a note of defiance in his voice.

He was touched to hear her answer quickly:

"No, not at all."

Gusts of warm wind wafted towards them the fragrance of the gardens beside the road, a fume of freshly watered mould, and the thick pungency of marigolds and heliotropes. Jacques found nothing more to say and it was she who broke the silence first.

"And by dint of all those confessions, you brought off the marriage?"

"Certainly not, quite the opposite. I tried my best to prevent him from doing anything so silly. Think of it! A widow, fourteen years older than he, with a child, what's more! And now his people have dropped him completely. But there was no holding him." He remembered that he had often used the word "possessed"—in its theological sense—when speaking of his friend and it had struck him as felicitous. "Battaincourt is positively possessed by that woman."

"Is she pretty?" Jenny asked, disregarding the strong term he had used.

He pondered so deeply that she pursed her lips.

"I'd no notion I was setting you such a poser!"

But he remained, unsmiling, in a brown study.

"Pretty? Well, hardly that. She's sinister. I can't find any other word for it." He paused again. "Oh, it's a queer world!" he exclaimed. He caught the look of surprise on Jenny's face. "Yes, I mean it. Every one's so queer. Even quite uninteresting people. Have you ever noticed, whenever you speak of a person you know to others who know him too, how many small points that are really suggestive and revealing seem to have escaped them? That's why people misunderstand each other so often."

He looked at her again and felt that she had been listening attentively and was repeating to herself what he had just said. And suddenly the cloud of mistrust which hung over his relations with Jenny seemed to lift, giving place to radiant understanding. To make the most of her attention, so rarely given him, and rouse her interest further, he fell to describing certain incidents at the wedding which were still fresh in his mind.

"Where was I?" he murmured hazily. "Oh, I'd love to write that woman's life one day—from the little I learned of her! She was once a shop-girl in one of the big stores, they say. That woman's a ruthless climber" (he quoted a tag he had jotted down in his note-book), "a Julien Sorel in petticoats! Do you like *Le Rouge et le Noir*?"

"No, not a bit."

"Really? Yes, I see what you mean." After a pensive moment he smiled and spoke again. "But, if I switch off onto side-issues, I'll never get to the end of it. Sure I'm not taking up too much of your time?"

She answered without thinking, reluctant to betray her desire-to hear more.

"Oh, no; we won't lunch till half-past twelve today, on Daniel's account."

"So Daniel's at home?"

She had to fall back on a downright lie.

"He said he might come," she replied with a blush. "But how about you?"

"I needn't hurry, as Father's in Paris. Shall we take the shady side? What I really want to tell you about is the wedding breakfast. Nothing much happened, yet, I assure you, it was a very poignant experience. Let's see! The setting, to begin with: an Old World château of sorts, with a dungeon restored by Goupillot. Goupillot was her first husband, a remarkable fellow too; he started as a haberdasher in a small way, but he had big business in the blood, and died a multimillionaire after providing every French provincial town with its 'Goupillot's Store.' You must have come across them. The widow, by the way, is enormously wealthy. I'd never met her before. How shall I describe her? A thin, lithe, ultra-smart woman, with rather shrewish features and a haughty profile; pale eyes that showed up against a rather muddy complexion—eyes of a moleskin grey, with a sort of gloss upon them, like stagnant ooze. Does that give you an idea of her? She has the manners of a spoilt child—far too youthful for her looks. She has a shrill voice and laughs a lot. Now and again— how shall I describe it?—you catch a flicker of grey fire between her eyelids, along the lashes, and, all of a sudden, the childish smalltalk she reels off seems to have something macabre behind it and you can't help recalling what people said soon after Goupillot's death, that she had poisoned him by inches."

"She gives me the shivers!" Jenny exclaimed, no longer trying to repress the interest Jacques's narrative roused in her. He felt the change and was pleasantly elated by it.

"Yes, you're right; she's rather terrifying. That was just what I felt when we took our seats and I saw her standing with that mask of steel upon her face behind the white flowers on the table."

"Was she in white?"

"Almost. It wasn't absolutely a wedding-dress; more of a garden-party costume, rather theatrical, a rich, creamy white. Breakfast was served at separate tables. She went on asking people right and left to sit at her table, quite regardless of the number of places at it. Battaincourt, who was near her, looked worried. 'You're muddling everything up, my dear,' he protested. You should have seen the look that passed between them—a curious look! It struck me that all that was young and vital had died out of their relations; they were living on the past."

Perhaps, thought Jenny, perhaps he is not so spoiled as I imagined, not so callous and … In a flash it dawned on her that she had always known Jacques to be sensitive and gentle. The discovery thrilled her and now, as she listened to his narrative, she found herself snatching at each phrase that might confirm her new and kindlier judgment of him.

"Simon had made me sit on his left. I was the only one of his friends to turn up. Daniel had promised, but backed out of it. Not a single member of Simon's family was present, not even the cousin with whom he had been brought up, and whom he had been counting on till the last train had gone. One felt sorry for the poor devil! He's a sensitive, rather nice-minded fellow, really; I know a lot of decent things about him. He looked at the people round him— strangers all! He thought of his family. 'I never dreamt,' he told me, 'that they'd be so terribly unrelenting. They *must* have it in for me!' He came back to it during the meal. 'Not a word from them, not even a wire! It looks as if they'd blotted me out of their lives. What do you think?' I didn't know what to reply. 'But,' he made haste to add, 'I don't mention this so much on my account—I don't care a damn! It's Anne I'm thinking of.' As luck would have it, the

sinister Anne was opening a telegram that had just been delivered, when he spoke. Battaincourt went quite pale. But the telegram was really for her, from a friend. That was the last straw; regardless of all the people watching, even of Anne with her impassive face and steely eyes intent on him, he burst into tears. She was furious, and he realized it soon enough. He was sitting next to her, of course. Putting his hand on her arm, he stammered out excuses like a naughty child: 'Do forgive me!' It was dreadful to hear him. She never turned a hair. And then—-it was even more painful to witness than his fit of weeping—he began talking cheerfully, cracking jokes, and sometimes, while he was saying something or other in a tone of forced gaiety, you could see the tears come to his eyes and, still talking away, he brushed them off with the back of his hand."

Jacques's emotion made it all so vivid that Jenny too was carried away.

"How horrible!"

Now, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he knew the thrills of authorship. An ecstasy. But he masked it disingenuously and made as if he had not heard her cry.

"Sure I'm not boring you?" He paused, then hurried on with his story. "That's not all. When dessert was served, they started shouting at the other tables: 'The bride and groom!' Battaincourt and his wife had to stand up, smile, and go the round of the room, lifting their glasses of champagne. Just then I observed a little incident that was touching in its way. On their tour round the tables they overlooked her daughter by husband number one—a little girl eight or nine years old. The kid ran after them. They'd got back to their seats by then. Anne embraced the little girl rather roughly, rumpling the child's collar. Then she pushed her daughter towards Battaincourt. But after that melancholy, unfriended tour of the room, his eyes were swimming with tears; he noticed nothing. Finally they had to put the little girl on his knee; then, with a ghastly, forced smile, he bent towards the other man's child. The kid held her cheek towards him; sad eyes she had—I shall never forget them. At last he kissed her and, as she stayed where she was, he started tickling her chin in a silly sort of way, like this, with one finger—do you see what I mean? It was painful to watch, I assure you; but it makes a good story, doesn't it?"

She turned towards Jacques, struck by the tone in which he had said "a good story." And now she noticed that the brooding, almost bestial look that so displeased her had left his face; the pupils of his eyes showed crystal-clear, sparkling with emotion and vivacity. Oh, why isn't he always like that? she thought.

Jacques began to smile. Painful as the experience had been, its poignancy weighed little beside the interest he took in other people's lives, in any display of human thoughts and feelings. Jenny shared his taste and, perhaps in her case just as in his, the pleasure was now enhanced by the knowledge that she was not alone.

They had reached the end of the avenue and the outskirts of the forest were in sight. Under the sun the grass shone like a burnished mirror. Jacques halted.

"I've been boring you with all this talk."

She made no protest.

But, instead of bidding her goodbye, he ventured a suggestion.

"As I've come so far, I'd like to have a word with your brother."

The reminder of the lie she had told was decidedly ill-timed, and she was the more annoyed that he had so readily believed it. She did not answer him, and Jacques took her silence to mean that she had had enough of his company.

He felt chagrined, but could not bring himself to leave her thus, with an unfavourable impression of him—now, least of all, when it seemed to him that something new had come into their relations, something after which, for months, perhaps for years, he had been yearning unawares.

They walked in silence between the acacias lining the road that led to the garden gate. Jacques, who was a little behind Jenny, could see the pensive, graceful outline of her cheek.

The further he advanced, the less excuse he had for leaving her; minute linked minute in a chain. Now they were at the gate. Jenny opened it; he followed her across the garden. The terrace was deserted, the drawing-room empty.

"Mother!" Jenny called.

No one answered. She went to the kitchen window and, bound by her lie, inquired:

"Has my brother come?"

"No, Miss. But a telegram 'ias just been brought."

"Don't disturb your mother," Jacques said at last. "I'm off."

Jenny remained stiffly erect, an obdurate look on her face.

"*Au revoir*," Jacques murmured. "See you tomorrow, perhaps?"

"*Au revoir*" she said, making no move to see him to the gate.

The moment Jacques had turned to go she entered the hall, slammed her racket into the press, and flung it upon a wooden chest, venting her ill-humour in a display of needless violence.

"No, not tomorrow!" she exclaimed. "Certainly not tomorrow!"

Mme. de Fontanin, who was in her bedroom, had not failed to hear her daughter calling, and had recognized Jacques's voice, but she was too upset to feign an air of calmness. The telegram she had just opened came from her husband. Jerome announced that he was at Amsterdam, penniless and friendless, with Noémie, who had fallen ill. Mme. de Fontanin had come to a speedy decision: she would go to Paris that very day, draw out all the money in her account, and send it to the address given by Jerome.

When her daughter entered the room, she was dressing. Jenny was shocked by the anguish on her mother's face and the sight of the telegram lying on the table.

"What ever is the matter?" she exclaimed, while the thought flashed through her mind: Something's happened and I wasn't there. It's all Jacques's fault!

"Nothing serious, darling," Mme. de Fontanin replied. "Your father … your father's short of money, that's all." Then, ashamed of her own weakness and, most of all, thus to disclose a father's failings to his child, she blushed and hid her face between her hands.

# VII

BEHIND the misted windows dawn was rising. Huddled in a corner of the railway-car, Mme. de Fontanin watched with unseeing eyes the green plains of Holland slipping past.

She had gone to Paris on the previous day and found another telegram from Jerome awaiting her at home: "Doctor given Noémie up. Cannot stay here alone. Implore you come. Bring money if possible." She had not been able to get in touch with Daniel before the night train left, and had scribbled a note telling him she was leaving and he must look after Jenny.

The train stopped. Voices were crying: "Haarlem!"

It was the last stop before Amsterdam. The lights were switched off. The sun, invisible as yet, sheeted the sky with a pearly lustre, mottled with rainbow gleams. Her fellow-travellers awoke, stretched their limbs, and bundled up their things. Mme. de Fontanin remained unmoving, trying to prolong the apathy which spared her still, to some extent, from realizing what she had undertaken. So Noémie was dying. She tried to peer into her mind. Was she jealous? No. For jealousy—that meant the fiery gusts of feeling that had seared her heart during their early years of married life, when she still kept open house to doubt and blinded herself to reality, fighting back a hateful horde of visual obsessions. For many years past not jealousy had rankled, but a sense of the injustice done her. And had it really rankled, truth to tell? Her trials had been of a quite different order. Had she in fact been at any stage a jealous woman? Her real grief had always been to discover—ever too late—that she had been duped; her feeling towards Jerome's mistresses was oftener than not a rather distant pity, sometimes touched with fellow-feeling, as towards sisters in distress.

Her fingers were trembling when it was time to fasten up her luggage. She was the last to leave the compartment. The rapid, startled glance she cast about her did not meet the look whose impact she expected. Surely he had got her wire? It might be that his eyes were fixed on her, and at the thought she pulled herself together and followed the outgoing stream of passengers.

Someone touched her arm. Jerome stood before her, looking diffident but delighted. As, with bared head, he bowed towards her, despite his careworn features and the slight stoop he had developed, he had still the exotic charm of some eastern potentate. They were caught in the rush of travellers before he could shape a phrase of welcome for Thérèse, but he took her bag from her hands with tender solicitude. So *she* is not dead, Mme. de Fontanin reflected, and shuddered at the thought that she might have to watch her die.

They entered the station yard in silence and M. de Fontanin hailed a cab. Suddenly, as she was stepping into it, a wave of emotion that was almost joy flooded her senses: she had heard Jerome's voice. While he was talking to the cabman in Dutch, telling him where to go, she paused a moment on the step in vibrant immobility, then, opening her eyes again, she sank onto the seat.

No sooner was he seated in the open carriage than he turned in her direction; once again she looked into the darkly glowing eyes she knew so well and felt their ardency envelop her like a caress. He seemed about to take her hand, to touch her arm; the gesture was so ill assorted with the courteous reticence of his demeanour that she felt almost shocked, as if he had offered her an insult, yet thrilled by the intimation of a living love, all hope of which had died.

She was the first to break the silence. "How is …?" Stumbling at the name, she hastily went on: "Is she in pain?"

"No, no. That's all over now."

Though she would not meet his eyes, the way he spoke convinced her that Noémie was much better; it seemed to her that he was feeling some embarrassment at having summoned his wife to the bedside of a sick mistress. A pang of regret shot through her heart. Now she could not imagine what evil genius had prompted her to take this ill-considered step. What business had she here—now that Noémie would recover, and life go on its way again, unchanged? She decided to leave at once.

"Thank you, Thérèse," Jerome murmured. "Thank you."

There was a note of affection in his voice, of diffidence and respect. She noticed that Jerome's hand, resting on his knee, was thinner, and evidently trembling a little; the massive signet-ring hung slack upon his finger. She would not raise her eyes, but fixed them on his gloveless hand, and now she could not bring herself to regret the impulse that had brought her here. Why go away? She had acted spontaneously, prayer had inspired the impulse, surely no harm could come of it! Now that she could fall back on her faith, as bidding her reject all thoughts of drawing back, her confidence revived. Never had her heavenly guide left her for long the prey of doubts.

They were entering a vast and spacious city, laid out in endless vistas. At this early hour the shutters were still drawn across the shop-fronts, but the sidewalks were loud with workmen hastening to their tasks. The cab turned into a narrower street where short stretches of causeway alternated with hump-backed bridges spanning a sequence of parallel canals. Tall, slender houses lined the waterfront, and the red facades, bare of ornaments but studded with white windows, were mirrored in the almost stagnant water between the branches of elms that drooped beside the quays. Mme. de Fontanin realized that France was very far away.

"How are the children?" Jerome inquired.

She had noticed his hesitation in putting the question; he was moved, and for once made no attempt to hide his emotion.

"Quite well."

"What's Daniel doing?"

"He's at Paris, working. He comes to Maisons whenever he is free."

"So you're at Maisons?"

"Yes."

He was silent; the park, the house beside the forest that he knew so well, rose up before his eyes.

"And … Jenny?"

"She is quite well." An unspoken question hovered in his eyes. "Jenny's grown much taller," she went on; "very much changed, in fact."

Jerome's eyelids quivered and his voice was shaken by emotion when he answered her.

"Yes, I suppose that's so. She must have changed a lot." Looking away, he relapsed into silence. Then, passing his hand over his forehead, he exclaimed in a sombre voice: "How ghastly it all is!" And, almost in the same breath, added: "I have practically no money left, Thérèse."

"I've brought some," she answered impulsively.

She had heard such agony in Jerome's cry that, with the knowledge she could set his fears at rest, her immediate feeling was one of thankfulness. But close upon it came another thought that stung her: the report of Noémie's illness had, quite likely, been exaggerated —it was for the money, only for that, they had lured her here! And she felt sick with disgust when, after a slight hesitation, in a voice thickened by shame, Jerome blurted out the question:

"How much?"

She fought back a brief temptation to understate the sum.

"All I could scrape together," she replied. "A little over three thousand francs."

"Thank you, thank you," he stammered. "Ah, Thérèse, if you only knew …! The chief thing is to settle the doctor's bill: five hundred florins."

The cab had crossed a stone bridge spanning what looked like a wide river, crowded with shipping; now, after traversing some narrow suburban streets, it entered a small square and pulled up in front of a flight of steps abutting on a chapel. Jerome alighted, paid the cabman, and lifted out his wife's bag. Then, without more ado, he helped Thérèse down from the vehicle, walked up the steps, and held the door ajar. It seemed to be neither a Catholic nor a Protestant church; a synagogue, perhaps.

"I must ask you to excuse me," he whispered, "but I don't want to drive up to the house. They keep a sharp lookout on strangers— I'll explain later." Then with a quick change of tone he became the man-about-town, making an affable suggestion. "Isn't the air delicious this morning? I'm sure you won't mind a short walk. I'll lead the way, shall I?"

She followed him without comment. The cab was out of sight. Jerome took her along a vaulted passage leading down a flight of stone steps to the solitary quay of a canal; on the other side the houses came down straight to the edge of the water which lapped the basements. Sunlight played on brick walls and flashing window-panes; the sills were gay with nasturtiums and geraniums. The quay was crowded with people, trestle-tables, and baskets; an open-air market was being set up and, amidst the oddments and old junk, small craft were unlading boatloads of flowers whose perfumes mingled with the musty reek of stagnant water.

Jerome turned towards his wife.

"Not too tired, sweetheart?"

He gave a singing lilt to the word—-"sweetheart"—just as in the old days. She dropped her eyes and did not answer him.

Without an inkling of the emotions he had conjured up he pointed to a house with low eaves, to which a footbridge gave access.

"There it is," he said. "Yes, it's not much of a place. You must forgive me for this poor welcome."

As he said, the house had a humble appearance, but the fresh coat of brown stucco and the white woodwork reminded her of a well-kept yacht. The flame-coloured blinds of the second floor were down, and on them she could read in unassuming letters:

PENSION ROOSJE-METHILDA.

So Jerome was living in some sort of hotel, a nondescript abode where the sensation that they were her hosts would not weigh too heavily; that, anyhow, was a relief.

They stepped onto the footbridge. There was a movement at one of the blinds. Was Noémie on the watch? Mme. de Fontanin drew herself erect. It was only then she noticed, between two ground-floor windows, a crudely painted metal sign depicting a stork beside its nest, whence a naked baby was emerging.

They went along a corridor, then up a staircase redolent of beeswax. Jerome halted on the landing and knocked twice. She could hear whispers behind the door, a peephole shutter was drawn aside, and presently the door was opened cautiously, just enough to let Jerome in.

"Will you allow me …?" he murmured. "I'll just let them know."

Mme. de Fontanin heard a brief colloquy in Dutch, and almost immediately Jerome opened the door wide. The others had gone. She followed him along an interminable, winding passage with a beeswaxed floor. Mme. de Fontanin felt ill at ease; the thought that she might encounter Noémie at any moment unnerved her and she had to summon up all her courage to preserve her calm demeanour. But there was no one in the room they entered; it was clean and cheerful, and gave onto the canal.

"Here, sweetheart," said Jerome, "you are—at home!"

An unuttered question rose to her lips: "And what about Noémie?"

He read her thought.

"I must leave you for a moment," he said. "I'll just go and see if I'm needed."

But, before leaving, he went towards his wife and took her hand.

"Oh, Thérèse, I must, I must tell you. … If you only knew what a terrible time I've been having! But, now you are here… ." His lips and cheek caressed Mme. de Fontanin's hand. She shrank from his touch; he made no effort to coerce her. "I'll come back for you in a moment… . You're sure you don't mind—seeing her again?" He began to move away.

Yes, she would see Noémie once again; she had come to this place of her own accord, and she would see it through. But after that, without wasting a moment, she would go away, whatever came of it. She made a gesture of assent, and, oblivious of Jerome's stammered thanks, bent over her valise, pretending to hunt for something in it, till he had left the room.

Alone now with her thoughts, she felt less sure of herself. Taking off her hat, she glanced into the mirror and noticed her tired face. She passed her hand over her forehead. What could have induced her to come here? She felt ashamed.

A knock at the door cut short her mood of weakness. She had no time to say "Come in" before it opened. The woman in a red dressing-gown who entered was obviously past her prime, despite her jet-black hair and made-up complexion. She put some questions in a tongue that Mme. de Fontanin did not understand, made an impatient gesture, and called in another woman who evidently had been waiting in the corridor. The new-comer was younger and she, too, wore a dressing-gown; hers was sky-blue. She greeted Mme. de Fontanin in a guttural voice:

"*Dag*, Madame. Good morning."

The Dutchwomen held a brief colloquy, the older explaining what the other was to say. The younger woman paused a moment, then, turning amiably towards Mme. de Fontanin, addressed her, halting between each sentence:

"The lady says you shall take off the sick lady. You must pay the bill and move to one other house. *Verstaat U*? Understand you what I say?"

Mme. de Fontanin made an evasive gesture—all this was no concern of hers. The older woman broke in again; she seemed worried and determined to have her way.

"The lady says," the young woman interpreted, "even if you pay not the bill at once, you must move, go away, take the sick lady to a room in an hotel somewhere else. *Verstaat U*? That is better for the *Politie*."

The door was flung open and Jerome appeared. Going up to the woman in red, he began scolding her in Dutch, propelling her meanwhile over the threshold. The woman in blue said nothing; her bold eyes wandered from Jerome's face to Mme. de Fontanin's, and back again. The older woman was obviously in a blazing temper; raising an arm that jangled a full peal of bracelets like a gipsy's, she spluttered incoherent phrases in which certain words recurred like a refrain:

"*Morgen . . , Morgen … Politie …*"

At last Jerome managed to ged rid of them, and turned the key.

"Really, I'm dreadfully sorry." His face showed his vexation as he turned towards his wife.

Thérèse realized now that, instead of going to Noémie, he had adjourned to his room, to complete his toilet; he had just shaved, there was a touch of powder on his cheek, and he looked younger. And I, she thought, what a sight I must be, after travelling all night!

"I should have told you to lock yourself in," he explained. "The old dame who runs the place is a decent soul in her way, but she talks too much and has no manners."

"What did she want of me?" Thérèse inquired absent-mindedly. The odour of lavender that always floated round Jerome when he had just finished dressing had evoked the past, leaving her pensive for some moments, with parted lips and brooding eyes.

"I haven't a notion what she was jabbering about," he replied. "She probably mistook you for someone else who's staying here."

"The woman in blue told me several times to pay the bill and go elsewhere."

Jerome laughed. She seemed to hear an echo from the past—that rather artificial, self-satisfied way he had of laughing, with his head flung back.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Too absurd for words!" he guffawed. "Perhaps the old hag thought I wouldn't pay her." He seemed to consider it unthinkable that he should ever be at a loss to pay his debts. Then suddenly his face fell. "Am I to blame? I tried my best, but no hotel would hear of taking us in."

"But I gathered from her it had to do with the police."

He seemed astounded.

"What? She mentioned the police?"

"Yes, I think so." Once more she caught on Jerome's face that look of dubious innocence which she associated with the darkest moments of her life; it gave her a sudden nausea, as though the air in the room were plague-infected.

"An old wives' tale, all that! Why should there be a police inquiry? Just because there happens to be a consulting-room on the ground floor? No. The only thing that matters is to be able to pay that doctor fellow his five hundred florins."

Mme. de Fontanin was as mystified as ever and this distressed her, for she always liked things made clear. But what grieved her most was to find that once again Jerome had let himself become entangled in a network of intrigues of which she hardly liked to think.

"How long have you been staying here?" she asked, hoping to get something definite out of him.

"Two weeks. No, not so long; ten or twelve days, more likely. I've lost track of things… ."

"And … her illness?" The tone was so insistent that he dared not evade her question.

"That's just what the trouble's about." The reply came pat enough. "With these foreign doctors it's so hard to make out what is really the matter. It's a local disease of sorts, one of those—er—Dutch fevers, you know—something to do with the miasma from the canals." He pondered for a moment. "This city reeks with malaria, you know; the air is full of infections the doctors don't know much about."

She listened to him perfunctorily, but could not help noticing that, whenever Noémie was in question, Jerome's attitude—the way he shrugged his shoulders, his casual air when speaking of her illness— was hardly that of a devoted lover. But she forbade herself to see in this an avowal of estrangement.

He did not observe the searching glance she cast on him; he had gone to the window, and, though he had not moved the blind, his eyes were fixed intently on the quay. When he came back to her, his face had assumed the earnest and sincere yet disillusioned air she knew so well and so much dreaded.

"Thank you, dear, you're very good to me!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I've wounded you again and again—and yet you have come to me. Thérèse … Sweetheart …"

Shrinking away, she would not meet his eyes. But, such was her insight into others' feelings—into Jerome's most of all—she could not question the sincerity of his emotion and his gratitude at this moment. Yet she could not bring herself to answer, or prolong the conversation.

"Please take me … there," she said.

After a brief hesitation, he gave way.

"Come."

The moment she dreaded was at hand. "I must be brave," she murmured as she followed him down the long dark corridor. "Is she still in bed … convalescent? What shall I say to her?" It struck her once more how worn out she must look after her journey, and she wished she had at least put on her hat again.

Jerome halted at a closed door. With a trembling hand Mme. de Fontanin settled her white hair. "She'll find me looking terribly old," she all but said aloud, and all her self-confidence oozed away.

Jerome opened the door noiselessly. So she's in bed, Mme. de Fontanin decided.

Chintz curtains patterned with blue flowers were drawn across the window and a subdued light filled the room. Two women, whom she had not seen before, rose as she came in. One of them, who wore an apron and was busy knitting, was presumably a servant or an attendant; the other, a buxom matron some fifty years old, had a violet bandanna round her head and looked like an Italian peasant. As Mme. de Fontanin entered, the older woman began to beat a retreat, whispering something in Jerome's ear as she went out.

Thérèse did not notice the woman's departure, or the disorder of the room, the basin and the dirty towels littering the sheets. Her gaze was riveted on the sick woman stretched flat upon the pillowless bed. Would Noémie turn in her direction? She was snoring, seemingly asleep. A craven impulse urged Mme. de Fontanin to leave her to her rest, and go; but then Jerome signed to her to come to the foot of the bed and she dared not refuse. Then she saw that Noémie's eyes were open and the stertorous breathing came in gasps from her wide-open mouth. As she grew used to the half-light she saw a bloodless face and ice-blue eyes, their pupils set in the glassy stare of butchered animals. In a flash it came to her that she was standing by a deathbed and in her consternation she turned quickly with a cry for help upon her lips. But Jerome was at her side, gazing at the dying woman; his grief was plain to read upon his face and she saw at once that he had nothing to learn from her.

"Since her last hemorrhage—it was the fourth attack," he whispered, "she has never regained consciousness. She has been like that all night." Tears gathered slowly at the edges of his eyelids, hung for a moment on the lashes, rolled down his sallow cheeks.

Mme. de Fontanin tried in vain to pull herself together; she could hardly bring herself to admit the evidence of her eyes.

Yes, Noémie was dying and would pass out of their lives; Noémie, whom only a moment ago she had pictured as triumphing over her! She dared not take her eyes of! the dying woman's face where even now all movement was arrested—the rigid nostrils, dulled eyes, and bloodless lips through which the rattling breath, coming, it seemed, from very far away, rose and ebbed, and feebly rose again. She lingered on each feature, turn by turn, with curiosity (which was half terror) still unsated. Could that be Noémie—that shape of ashen, bloodless flesh, with a wisp of brown hair plastered across a dry, white-gleaming forehead? Drained of colour and expression, the face seemed wholly unfamiliar. How long was it since she last saw Noémie? Then it came back to her, the day live or six years ago when she had rushed to Noémie's house to cry in vain: "Give me back my husband!" Her cousin's shrill laugh seemed echoing in her ears, and she remembered with a shudder the handsome woman lolling on the sofa, and her glimpse of a plump shoulder stirring beneath the lace. That was the day when Nicole had run up to her in the hall and …

"What about Nicole?" she asked abruptly.

"Nicole?"

"Have you let her know?"

"No."

How was it she did not think of this herself, when leaving Paris? She drew Jerome aside.

"You *must*, Jerome. She's Nicole's mother."

The look of entreaty on his face gave her the measure of his weakness, and her resolution faltered too. To think of Nicole coming to this hateful house, entering such a room, confronting Jerome by this bedside! But she insisted, though her tone was less assured.

"You *must!*"

The curious earth-brown hue which darkened Jerome's dusky skin still more whenever he was thwarted came to his cheeks; his narrow lips set in a harsh grimace, baring his teeth.

"Jerome, Nicole must be sent for," she repeated gently.

His slender eyebrows drew together, drooped, and for a while he still held out. At last, raising his hard eyes to hers, he yielded.

"What is her address?"

When he had left to send the telegram she returned to the bed; somehow she could not tear herself away from it. She stood beside it with drooping arms, her fingers locked. What had possessed her to imagine Noémie out of danger? And why did Jerome not seem more distressed? What were his plans? Would he come back to live with her? Certainly no such suggestion would cross her lips; yet she would not deny him shelter, if he asked it.

A grateful mood of peace, almost of happiness, crept over her; the feeling shamed her and she sought to banish it. To pray. To pray for this departing soul that was returning to the Universal Soul. Poor soul, she thought, that takes so little with her on her way! Yet, in the ineluctable ascent of all towards a higher plane, through the vast sequence of our earthly incarnations, does not each upward effort, however feeble, tell in favour of the one who makes it? Does not each trial mean a step forward on the pathway of perfection? That Noémie had suffered, Thérèse could not doubt. Despite the specious glamour of her life, surely there had rankled in the poor woman's heart a deep unrest, the dull ache of a conscience that, for all its unconcern, trembled in secret at its degradation. And now that suffering would be accounted to the poor soul's credit in another, better life; and her love, too, despite its guilt and the evil it had done. This, in her present mood, Thérèse could readily forgive. Still, she reflected, such forgiveness did her little honour. For, there was no denying it, she could not persuade herself that Noémie's death would be a great misfortune. For anyone. Her feelings were evolving with remorseless speed; she, like Jerome, was growing used to the notion that Noémie was to pass out of their lives. Less than an hour had gone since first she *knew*—and, already, almost her only feeling was one of resignation.

When, two days later, Nicole stepped down from the Paris express, her mother had been dead for thirty-six hours; the funeral was to take place on the following morning.

Everyone concerned seemed eager to have done with it—the proprietress of the pension, Jerome, and, most of all, the young doctor, recipient of the five hundred florins, who had signed the death certificate without even coming upstairs to view the body, after a brief parley in one of the ground-floor rooms.

Harrowing though the task would have been, Thérèse expressed a desire to help in laying out the body; she wished to be able to tell Nicole that she had carried out this pious duty in her stead. But, at the last moment and on trivial grounds, they had refused her access to the room; the midwife had insisted on attending to the laying out—"After all, she's used to it," Jerome had observed—in the presence of the nurse alone.

Nicole's arrival brought a welcome change. Hour by hour Mme. de Fontanin had been finding her encounters in the corridor, with pension-keeper, doctor, and the nurse, more and more unbearable; indeed, from the moment she had come, the atmosphere she was breathing in this house seemed to suffocate her. Nicole's open face, her youth and health, brought a breath of fresh, cleansing air into

the place. The violence of her grief, however—Jerome was so unnerved by it that he took refuge in another room—struck Mme. de Fontanin as disproportioned to the girl's true feelings towards a mother she had cast out of her life. The childish extravagance of her outburst bore out the older woman's view of her niece's mentality; a warm-hearted girl, she thought, but lacking real depth of character.

Nicole wanted to bring her mother's body back to France; as she declined to have anything to do with Jerome, whom she still held responsible for her mother's lapse, her aunt volunteered to sound him on the matter. Jerome met the proposal with an emphatic veto. He expatiated on the exorbitant railway charges in such cases, the endless formalities involved, and, finally, the inquest on which, needless though it was, the local police would certainly insist; they delighted, Jerome averred, in putting foreigners to inconvenience. So Nicole's plan had to be dropped.

Exhausted though she was by her emotions and the journey, Nicole insisted on keeping vigil beside the coffin. The three of them passed the night, in silence and alone, in Noémie's room. The coffin, spread with flowers, rested on two chairs. So heady was the perfume of jessamine and roses that they had to keep the window wide open. The night was hot, and bright as day with dazzling moonlight. Now and again they heard low sounds of water lapping round the piles which supported the house. Near at hand the passing hours chimed from a clock-tower. A moonbeam, gliding across the floor, crept every minute nearer to an over-blown white rose fallen beside the coffin's foot, making it seem translucent, almost blue. Nicole's indignant eyes took in the squalor of the room; here her mother had lived, perhaps; assuredly had suffered. She was counting up, perhaps, the printed flowers on yonder curtain when first she heard death's summons and, in a tragic pageant, the follies of her wasted life had passed before her dying eyes. Had she given her daughter then a last, belated thought?

The funeral took place very early next day. Neither midwife nor pension-keeper put in an appearance. Thérèse walked between Jerome and Nicole, and the only other mourner was an old clergyman whom Mme. de Fontanin had sent for to attend the funeral and read the burial service.

To spare Nicole another visit to the odious house beside the canal, Mme. de Fontanin decided to take the girl directly to the station on leaving the graveyard. Jerome would follow up with the luggage. Moreover, Nicole refused to take over any object whatsoever associated with her mother's life abroad; the decision to leave Noémie's trunks behind made the final settlement with the proprietress a much simpler matter.

When all the bills had been paid and Jerome was on his way to the station, he found he had a good deal of time on his hands before the train was due to leave; yielding to a sudden impulse, he directed the cabman to take another road, and revisited the graveyard for the last time.

He lost his way several times before finding the grave again. When he sighted in the distance a mound of newly turned earth, he took off his hat and walked towards it with measured steps. Here lay all that remained of their six years of life in common, of quarrels, jealousy, and reconcilements; six years of memories and secrets shared—all to end in the final, most tragic secret whose upshot lay before his eyes.

"After all, things might have turned out worse; I do not seem to feel it much," he consoled himself, though his careworn forehead and blinding tears appeared to belie the thought. Was he to blame if rejoicing over his wife's return outweighed his grief? Surely there had been one love only in his life—Thérèse! But would she ever understand that? Would she ever forgo her cold austerity and realize that, appearances notwithstanding, she alone fulfilled the life of this too wayward lover, who yet had loved with all his soul one woman only? Would it ever come to her that, beside the wholehearted devotion he bestowed on her, no other love of his was more than a passing fancy? Surely this very moment bore him out—Noémie's death had left him neither lost nor lonely. So long as Thérèse lived, though she were even more aloof from him, though she might fancy every bond between them severed, he was not alone. For an instant he tried to picture Thérèse lying there under the flower-strewn turf; but found the thought unbearable. He hardly blamed himself at all for any of the sufferings he had brought on his wife, so firm was his conviction at this solemn moment that he had deprived her of nothing which really mattered, but had devoted to her all that was best and most enduring in his heart—so sure was he that he had never for a moment been unfaithful to her. What are her plans for me? he asked himself, but with no anxiety. Surely she would want him to come back to her and to the children. His head was bowed, his cheeks were wet with tears—but in his heart hope glowed insidiously.

If it weren't for Nicole, all would be for the best! he thought. He recalled the girl's hostile silence and her steely eyes. He saw her again bending above the grave, and heard again the dry, racking sob she had not been able to keep back.

Yes, the thought of Nicole was a torment to him. Was it not on? his account that, angered beyond bearing, she had fled her mother's: house? A passage from the Gospels echoed in his memory: "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" How shall I make amends?.' he wondered. He could not endure the thought that anyone disapproved of him… . Suddenly he had an inspiration. Why not adopt her as his daughter?

Yes, that settled everything! In his mind's eye he pictured it—the little flat that he would share with Nicole; she would, of course, arrange it to her liking, keep house for him, help him to entertain. How everybody would admire his gesture of contrition! Thérèse, too, would approve.

He put on his hat again and, turning his back on the grave, walked briskly to the cab.

The train had been in for some time when he reached the station. The two women had already taken their seats. Mme. de Fontanin was perturbed by her husband's delay in coming. Had some complication arisen at the pension? Almost anything seemed possible. Would Jerome be prevented from leaving? Was her dream of bringing him back to Maisons, of smoothing the way for his return to her and, it well might be, for his repentance—was her fond dream so soon to vanish like a mirage? Her apprehension grew to panic when she saw him approaching with rapid strides and an anxious air.

"Where is Nicole?"

"Why, over there, in the corridor," Mme. de Fontanin replied with some surprise.

The window was half down and Nicole stood beside it, idly gazing at the gleaming network of rails. She felt sad, but weary most of all; sad, yet happy too, for today's sorrow could not even for an instant quell her secret joy. Her mother was dead—but was not the man she loved awaiting her? And once again she tried to ban the thought, as something impious, from her mind, that her mother's death could not but prove, for her lover anyhow, a relief—a lifting of the one and only shadow that hitherto had dimmed their future.

She did not hear Jerome's step behind her.

"Nicole, I implore you—for your mother's sake—forgive me!"

She started and turned round. He stood before her, hat in hand, his eyes aglow with humble entreaty. And now his face, ravaged by sorrow and remorse, no longer disgusted her; she was touched by pity. She could almost fancy that this opportunity for kindliness was of her seeking; yes, she would forgive him.

Without answering, impulsively, she held out her little black-gloved hand, and he pressed it with unfeigned emotion.

"Thank you," he murmured. Then he moved away.

Some minutes passed. Nicole did not move. Things were better so, she thought, if only for her aunt's sake; and then, of course, there would be Felix to tell about this touching little incident. People were bustling along the corridor, jostling her with their luggage. At last the train began to pull out. The sudden stresses helped to dispel her lethargy, and she returned to the compartment. Late-comers occupied the seats which only a moment earlier were empty. At the far end, ensconced in the corner-seat facing Mme. de Fontanin, one arm lolling in a leather window-strap and eyes fixed on the landscape, her uncle Jerome, she observed, was munching a ham sandwich.

# VIII

JACQUES spent the evening trying to reconstruct, word for word, his talk with Jenny. He made no attempt to analyse what exactly it was that drew his thoughts so urgently towards that conversation, yet it obsessed his mind. He woke up several times in the course of the night and harked back each time to the same theme with unabated eagerness. So, naturally enough, he was bitterly disappointed when he went to the tennis-club next morning only to find that Jenny had not turned up.

He was asked to join in a set and thought it better to comply, but he played badly, for his eyes strayed all the time towards the entrance-gate. The morning passed and soon it was too late to hope that Jenny would come. He made his escape the moment he could decently do so. His hope had failed him, but he was not hopeless yet.

Then he saw Daniel coming towards him.

"Where's Jenny?" he asked at once. Daniel's presence at this hour was unexpected, but he made no comment on it.

"She's not playing this morning. Are you leaving now? Then I'll come along with you. I've been at Maisons since yesterday evening." As soon as they had left the club grounds he explained: "Mother's been called away, you see; she asked me to sleep at home so that Jenny wouldn't be alone at night—our house is such miles from anywhere. It's another of my father's little games and Mother, poor thing, can never say no to him." A shadow flitted across his face, but soon was vanquished by a resolute smile, for Daniel had a short way with disagreeable thoughts. "And how are you getting on?" His eyes conveyed affectionate concern. "I've been thinking quite a lot about your *Startled Secret*; I like it as much as ever, you know. And the more I think about it the better I like it. Psychologically it's in a class by itself—a trifle brutal, perhaps, and a bit obscure in places. But you've hit on a fine idea and your two heroes are very life-like and, what's more, original."

"No, Daniel," Jacques broke in, unable to master his annoyance. "You mustn't judge me by that. To begin with, the style's abominable. Flatulent, lumpy, long-winded!" And to himself he added, raging inwardly: "Heredity, no doubt!"

"The theme, too," Jacques continued, "is still far too conventional, too made-to-order. A man's mental underworld… . Oh, I see quite well what's wanted, only …" He broke off abruptly.

"What are you working at now? Have you started on something else?"

"Yes." Jacques felt a blush rising to his cheeks, though he knew no reason for it. "But I'm mostly resting; I was more run down than I suspected, after a year's cramming. And then I've only just come back from attending poor old Battaincourt's wedding—that's one for you, you slacker!"

"Yes, Jenny told me about it."

Jacques blushed again. At first he felt a brief annoyance—that yesterday's talk had ceased to be a secret shared by Jenny and himself alone; but then he was agreeably thrilled to learn that she set store by what he said and it had so impressed her that she had spoken of it that very evening to her brother.

"Shall we take a stroll as far as the bank of the Seine?" he suggested, linking his arm in Daniel's. "We can talk on the way."

"Can't be done, old man. I'm off to Paris by the 1:20. I'm prepared to play the watchdog at night, you see; but in the daytime—" His smile conveyed the nature of the appointment that called him back to Paris; Jacques was displeased by it, and withdrew his arm.

"Look here," Daniel hastily suggested, anxious to ease the tension, "you'd better lunch with us. Jenny'll be delighted."

Jacques lowered his eyes to hide a new emotion and feigned some indecision. As his father was not back, there would be no bother about his missing a meal. He was dumbfounded by the rapture that swept over him, but mastered it enough to answer his friend.

"Thanks very much. I'll just drop in to warn them at home. You go on ahead. I'll meet you in the Castle Square."

Some minutes later he rejoined his friend, who was waiting for him, lying on the grass in front of the château.

"Isn't it fine here!" Daniel exclaimed, stretching his legs out in the sunshine. "The park's at its best this morning. You're a lucky fellow to live in such surroundings."

"And so could you," Jacques observed, "if you chose to."

Daniel stood up.

"Yes, no doubt I could," he admitted musingly but with a twinkle in his eye. "But I—well, it's not my style! Look here, old man!" He moved towards Jacques and a change came over his voice. "I think I'm in for a perfectly marvellous adventure."

"The green-eyed girl?"

"Green-eyed? I don't …"

"At Packmell's, you know."

Daniel stopped short and stared for a few seconds at the grass. Then a curious smile crossed his face.

"Ah, Rinette, you mean. No, someone new—miles ahead of her." He paused a while, lost in thought, before he spoke again. "Rinette! Yes, that was a queer girl, all right! Just imagine, it was she who dropped me after a day or two!" He laughed—the laugh of one whose way such an experience had never come before. "As a novelist, you'd have thought her thrilling, very likely. Personally, I found her boring. I've never known a woman one could make so little of. Why, even now I've no idea whether she was ever keen on me for ten consecutive minutes; but, when the loving mood was on her, well …! A bit queer, I should say. She must have had a pretty shady past and couldn't shake it off. I shouldn't be in the least surprised to learn thar she belonged to some secret society or other."

"So you've quite lost touch with her?"

"Absolutely. I don't even know what's become of her; she never showed up at Packmell's again. Sometimes I rather miss her," he added after a pause. "Anyhow it would have had to end pretty soon; I couldn't have stood her very long. You've no idea how tactless she could be. Always asking questions about my private life, yes— damn it!—about my family, my mother and sister . , . my father, even!"

He walked on in silence.

"Still, when all's said and done, I'm indebted to her for a priceless experience—that evening at Packmell's when I handed one to Ludwigson right in the eye."

"And, with the same shot, brought down your prospects, I suppose?"

"Meaning, I got the sack?" Daniel's eyes twinkled and a wide grin displayed his teeth. "I'd never had such an opportunity of taking friend Ludwigson's measure; well, he pretended not to remember a thing about it. You may think what you like about him; what I say is, he's a great boy in his own way."

Jenny had stayed at home all morning. When Daniel proposed escorting her to the tennis-club she had emphatically declined, professing to be busy. But she felt listless, at a loose end, and the time hung heavy on her hands.

When, from her window, she saw the two young men crossing the garden, her first feeling was one of vexation. She had looked forward to having her brother to herself, and here was Jacques spoiling everything! Still her ill-humour was not proof against Daniel's exuberance, as he cried to her through the half-open window:

"Guess whom I've brought back to lunch!"

I've time to change my dress, she thought.

Jacques was strolling to and fro in the garden; never as today had he appreciated the quiet beauty of Jenny's home. After the park, studded with villas, it had all the charm of an old-world farmhouse secluded on the margin of the forest. The central portion with its tall windows had evidently been a hunting-lodge, many times restored; more or less incongruous annexes had been built onto it at different periods. A flight of wooden steps, like the open ladders clamped to barns, led under a penthouse to the more lofty of the two wings. Jenny's pigeons scudded to and fro along the shelving tiles and the walls were rough-coated with a bright pink distemper which drank up the sunlight like an Italian stucco. A tangled conclave of tall fir-trees cast dry, cool shadows on the house and sunburnt grass, and the air beneath them had a brisk tang of resin.

Daniel was in great form at lunch and his gaiety was contagious; he had had an exhilarating morning and the afternoon promised well. He congratulated Jenny on her blue frock and pinned a white rose in her blouse, calling her "sister mine." He was amused by everyone and everything, even his own high spirits.

He insisted on being escorted to the station and seen into his train by Jacques and Jenny.

"Will you be back for dinner?" she inquired. Sometimes, Jacques noticed with a vague distress, a jarring undertone—which certainly was not intentional—crept into Jenny's voice, contrasting with her gentle, unassuming ways.

"It's quite in the cards," Daniel replied. "Anyhow I'll do my level best to catch the seven-o'clock train. In any case I shall be back before dark, as I promised Mamma in my letter." The small-boyish voice in which Daniel spoke the last words and his mature appearance were so charmingly incongruous that Jacques could not help laughing and even Jenny, as she stooped to clip the leash on her little dog's collar, looked up with a smile of amusement.

When the train came in Daniel noticed that the front cars were empty and ran towards them; from where they stood they saw him leaning out of the window and waving with his handkerchief a frivolous farewell.

Now they were alone, and the situation found them unprepared to deal with it; Daniel's high spirits had carried them off their feet. They managed, however, to keep up a tone of easy intimacy, as if Daniel still were serving as a link between them; and this new truce was such a relief to both that they were careful not to break its amity.

Rather depressed to see her brother leave, Jenny recalled his all too frequent absences from home.

"Couldn't you get Daniel to stop spending his vacation running backwards and forwards like this? He doesn't realize how sad it makes Mother, seeing so little of him this summer. But, of course, you'll stick up for him," she added, though without the least aggressiveness.

"No, I've not the least wish to do so," he replied. "Do you imagine I approve of the life he's leading?"

"Well, do you let him know that, anyhow?"

"Of course I do."

"And he won't listen to you?"

"He listens all right. But it goes deeper than that. I rather think he doesn't understand me."

"You mean, that he has *ceased* to understand you?"

"Very likely… . Yes."

From the outset their conversation had taken a serious turn. With Daniel as their theme there was a mutual understanding between them, which since yesterday was no new thing, but it had never before been given such free play. And, when they were about to turn into the park, it was from her that the suggestion came:

"How about going by the highroad? Then you could see me home through the forest. It's quite early, and such a lovely day!"

He made no effort to conceal the happiness that flooded his heart, but dared not let it master him. Fearing to snap the golden thread of sympathy between them, he hastily reverted to their common interest.

"Daniel has such a zest for living."

"Yes," she said, "I know it only too well. For living without control. But a life that's uncontrolled is very—very dangerous." Averting her eyes, she added: "And … impure."

"Impure," he repeated gravely. "Yes, I agree with you, Jenny."

Impurity! A word he little cared to use, yet one which very often rose to his lips, and now on hers he heard it with a sudden thrill. Yes, all Daniel's "affairs" were sullied by "impurity," and so was Antoine's passion. All carnal lusts were tainted in the same way. One thing, one only, in the world was pure—the nameless feeling which had been growing up within him for months and months and since yesterday unfolding, in gradual beauty, like a flower.

Steadying his voice, he continued:

"Sometimes I'm furious with him for the attitude he has taken up towards life, a sort of-"

"Perverseness," she added ingenuously; it was a word that often crossed her thoughts, her name for all that seemed obnoxious to her innocence.

"Personally, I'd rather call it cynicism," he amended, using in his turn an incorrect expression which he had twisted to his uses. But no sooner had he spoken than he felt he was not being wholly loyal to himself. "Don't imagine," he exclaimed hastily, "that I approve of a nature that is always fighting against itself. I prefer—" He paused, and Jenny hung on his words, eager to take his meaning—as though what he had just said were of exceptional importance in her eyes. "I prefer people who make a point of living according to their natures. All the same, they shouldn't—" He broke off. Several instances he did not think fit for Jenny's ears had crossed his mind.

"Yes," she agreed. "And I'm so afraid that Daniel may end by losing—what should I call it?—the sense of sin. Do you see what I mean?"

He nodded approval and now he could not refrain, either, from gazing at her intently, for the earnestness of her look added significance to her words. How she betrayed herself unwittingly, he mused, in that last remark!

She had her features well under control, but her set lips and laboured breathing vouched for the effort she was making to fight down one of those gusts of wild emotion which so often swept across her, emotion which she always did her utmost to conceal.

What can it be, Jacques wondered, that makes her face so apt to wear that hard, aloof expression? Is it because the line of her eyebrows is rather narrow, too precise? No, I fancy it must be the two dark cavities her pupils form in the grey-blue of the iris, when they contract. And, from this moment on he forgot about Daniel; his thoughts were all for Jenny.

For some minutes they walked on without speaking, and to them the silent interval, though it lasted quite a while, seemed very short. But, when they wanted to pick up the fallen strand of conversation, they found their thoughts had wandered far afield, almost, it seemed, in opposite directions. Neither could find a word to break the silence.

It so happened that they were passing a garage; the road was lined with cars under repair and the noise of running engines gave little scope for conversation.

A decrepit, mangy old dog shambled across the grease-stains on the road towards Puce, and began to show an interest in her; Jenny picked up her little dog in her arms. No sooner had they passed the workshop entrance than they heard cries behind them. A skeleton chassis, driven by a youngster of fifteen, had clattered out of the repair-shop and swung round so sharply that, despite the lad's belated cry of warning, the old dog had no time to get out of the way. Jacques and Jenny, who had turned round at the cry, saw the chassis catch the unfortunate animal in the side and two wheels pass over his body in quick succession.

Jenny gave a scream of horror:

"Oh, he's killed! He's killed!"

"No. He's got up again."

The dog had struggled up and fled in a blind panic, yelping and covered with blood. His shattered hindquarters trailed on the ground, making him move in zigzags, collapsing every few yards.

Jenny's face was twitching and she went on crying monotonously:

"He's killed! Oh, he's killed!"

The dog turned into a courtyard, its cries grew less frequent, then ceased altogether. The garage hands, glad of an excuse for knocking off work, followed up the trail of blood. One of them went as far as the house with the courtyard and shouted:

"He's dead! Not a kick left!"

With a gesture of relief, Jenny let her dog slip from her arms, and they set off again towards the forest. The emotion they had shared brought them still nearer to each other.

"I shall never forget," said Jacques, "your face and your voice when you called out just now."

"One loses one's head—it's silly. What did I say?"

" 'He's killed!' That's an interesting point, isn't it? You'd seen the dog run over by the car, pounded into a shapeless, bleeding mass — that was the really sickening part of it. And yet the real tragedy began only at the moment, the dreadful moment, when the poor beast who'd been alive a second earlier had to lie down and die. Don't you agree? The most moving thing of all is the unknowable transition, the headlong fall from life into nothingness. It haunts us all, the terror of that moment; it's a sort of—of mystical awe, always waiting on the threshold of our thoughts. Do you often think of death?"

"Yes. Well, I mean … not so very often. Do you?"

"Personally, I'm almost always thinking about it. Most of my thoughts bring me back to the idea of death. But"—he sounded discouraged—"however often one comes back to it, it's only a notion of the mind… ." And there he left it. For the moment he looked almost handsome, his face aglow with fervour, a zest for life mingled with dread of death.

They walked a little way before she broke the silence.

"I can't think what's brought it into my head—really it has nothing to do with what you were saying," she began in a hesitating voice. "But I've just remembered something … the first time I saw the sea. But perhaps Daniel's told you already?"

"No. Tell me about it."

"It's ancient history, you know—when I was fourteen or fifteen. It was near the end of the holidays and Mamma and I were going to join Daniel at Treport. He'd asked us to get out at some station or other on the way, and met us there with a farm-cart. As he didn't want to spoil my first impression of the sea by casual glimpses at the bends of the road, he blindfolded me—a silly idea, wasn't it? After a while he told me to get down and led me by the hand. I followed him, stumbling at every step. A terrific gale lashed my face and there was a perfectly fiendish din roaring and shrieking in my ears. I was scared to death and begged him not to take me any further. At last we came to the summit of the cliff, and Daniel slipped behind me and untied the handkerchief. Before my eyes lay the open sea and far beneath, where the cliff fell sheer, the waves were breaking on the rocks. On every side was sea, sea everywhere as far as eye could reach. I stopped breathing and collapsed into Daniel's arms. It took me some minutes to come to, and then I started sobbing, sobbing. They had to take me home and put me to bed; I had a temperature. Mamma was terribly upset. But now—do you know?—I don't regret it one bit; I feel I really know the sea."

Jacques had never seen her thus; no trace of melancholy on her face, her look unclouded, almost ecstatic. Then, suddenly, the fervour died from her face.

Little by little Jacques was discovering an unknown Jenny. Her abrupt changes of mood, from reticence to sudden outbursts, brought to his mind a choked but copious spring, which flowed only in sudden gushes. Here lay, he guessed, the secret of that innate

sadness which gave her face its contemplative air and lent such charm to her rare, transient smiles. And suddenly the thought appalled him, that such a walk as this must have an end.

"No need to hurry, is there?" he tentatively suggested, now they had passed beneath the arch of the old forest gate. "Let's take the long way round. I'll bet you've never tried that lane."

A sandy track, soft underfoot, led down into the darkness of a glen. Flanked at first by wide strips of grass, it narrowed as it went on. Here the trees thrived ill; their meagre leafage let the sunlight through on every side.

They walked on, not in the least troubled by their silence.

What's come over me? Jenny was wondering. He's so different from what I thought. Yes, he's … he's … But she could not find the word she wanted. How alike we are! she thought, with a strange thrill of certitude and joy. But then she grew anxious. What thoughts were in his mind?

But Jacques's mind was empty, lulled by a bliss devoid of thoughts. He walked beside her and asked nothing more of life.

"I'm afraid I'm taking you into one of the ugliest parts of the forest," he murmured at last.

She started at the sound of his voice and the same thought flashed across the minds of both: that their brief silence had been of crucial import for the vague dream that haunted both alike.

"Yes, I agree with you," she replied.

"Why, it isn't even real grass!" Jacques prodded the ground with his toecap. "It's a sort of dog-grass."

"Well, Puce certainly seems to take to it—just look!"

They spoke at random; common words seemed to have completely changed their sense and value for them.

That's a charming blue, thought Jacques, looking at her dress. How is it that a soft, greyish blue is so exactly her colour? Then his thoughts flew off at a tangent.

"I want to tell you something!" he exclaimed. "What makes me so dense is that I never can switch my attention off what's going on in my mind."

"I'm just the same." Jenny fancied she was capping his remark. "I'm nearly always daydreaming. I like it awfully; so do you, don't you? The things I dream are quite my own and I like to feel I needn't share them with anyone. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, absolutely!"

A sweet-brier grew beside the lane; some branches were in flower and on one the tiny hips were forming, Jacques was in half a mind to proffer them to her and quote: "I bring thee flowers and fruit and leafy boughs. And with them all … my heart!" Then he would pause, observing her. But his courage failed him. When they had passed the bush, he said to himself: "What a litterateur I am!"

"Do you like Verlaine?" he asked.

"Yes. *Sagesse*, which Daniel used to like so much, is my favourite."

He murmured:

> *"Beauté des jemmes, lew faiblesse, et ces mains pâles*
> *Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal …*

"And how about Mallarme?" he continued, after a pause. "I've quite a decent anthology of modern poets. Would you like me to bring it?"

"Yes."

"Do you care for Baudelaire?"

"Not so much. He's rather like Whitman. Anyhow, I don't know much of Baudelaire."

"Have you read Whitman?"

"Daniel read me some of his poems last winter. I can quite understand Whitman's appeal for him. But, as for me—" Again the word "impurity," which they had used a little while ago, rose to their minds. How like me she is! Jacques thought.

"As for you," he went on, "that's just the reason why you don't like Whitman so much as he does, isn't it?"

She nodded, grateful to him for uttering her unsaid thought.

The pathway, wider now, debouched into a clearing where a bench was set between two oak-trees stripped of their foliage by caterpillars. Jenny threw her wide-brimmed hat of supple straw onto the grass, and sat down.

"There are times," she exclaimed impulsively, as though she were thinking aloud, "when I almost wonder how it is you're such a bosom friend of Daniel's!"

"Why?" He smiled. "Do I strike you as being so very different from him?"

"Very different indeed—today."

He lay down on a grassy bank a little way from her.

"My bosom friend …" he repeated musingly. "Does he ever talk to you about me?"

"No. I mean, yes. Now and then."

She blushed; but he was not looking her way.

"Yes," he continued, nibbling a blade of grass, "nowadays there's a solid bond of affection between us; it's calm and tolerant. But we weren't always like that." Pausing, he pointed to a snail, translucent as an agate, which, clinging to a grass-haulm, timidly probed the sunlight with its viscid horns. "When I was working for the exam, you know," he added inconsequently, "I often used to think for weeks on end that I was going off my head; my brain was seething with such a ferment of ideas. And then—I was so lonely!"

"But you were living with your brother, weren't you?"

"Yes, luckily enough. And I was quite free—that, too, was a stroke of luck. Otherwise I think I'd have gone mad, really mad. Or else run away."

For the first time in her life she recalled the Marseille escapade with something like indulgence.

"I felt misunderstood." His voice grew sombre. "Misunderstood by everyone, even by my brother; often enough even by Daniel, too."

Just as I did! was her unspoken comment.

"When I was in those moods I couldn't summon up the faintest interest in my studies. I doped myself with reading—everything in Antoine's library, all the books Daniel could supply. I must have sampled nearly every modern novelist, French, English, and Russian. You simply can't imagine the thrills I got from books! And, afterwards, everything else seemed so deadly dull—my tutors, all their pedantic fumbling with texts, their precious cult of respectability. No, most decidedly that wasn't in my line at all!" He talked about himself without a trace of self-conceit; like all young people he was full of himself and could imagine no keener pleasure than to dissect his personality under attentive eyes; and his pleasure was infectious. "Those were the days," he continued, "when I used to write Daniel thirty-page letters that I'd spent all night concocting. Letters where I poured out all my day's enthusiasms and, most of all, disgusts. I suppose I ought to laugh at all that, now. But, no, I can't." He pressed his hand against his forehead. "The life I led in those days made me suffer far too intensely for me to make my peace with it, as yet. I had Daniel give me back my letters and I read them over again! They read like the confessions of a madman in his lucid intervals. Sometimes there were several days between them, sometimes only a few hours. Each was a sort of volcanic outburst, the eruption of a mental crisis, and, often as not, in flat contradiction with the one that went before it. A religious crisis, really, for I'd just been soaking myself in the Gospels or the Old Testament—or else in Comte and positivism. What a letter I wrote just after reading Emerson! I'd been through all the usual maladies of youth; a galloping 'Baudelairitis,' a sharp attack of Vinci. But none of them was chronic; they came and went! One day I rose a classicist and went to bed romantic, and made a secret holocaust of my Boileau and Malherbe in Antoine's laboratory. I performed the rite in solitude, laughing like a fiend. Next day everything that had to do with literature seemed to me utterly stale and unprofitable. I started delving into geometry, from the primers on; I'd set my heart on unearthing new laws that would turn all previous theories inside out. Then I had a spell of poetizing. I wrote odes for Daniel, Horatian epistles of two hundred lines, dashed off with hardly one erasure. The oddest thing of all"—his voice had suddenly grown calm—"was a pamphlet I composed in English, yes entirely in English, and entitled 'The Emancipation of the Individual in Relation to Society.' I gave it a preface, a short one, I grant, in—would you believe it?—modern Greek!" (The last detail was untrue; he remembered merely his intention to compose such a preface.) He burst out laughing. "No, I'm not really so mad as I seem!" he exclaimed after a pause. Then he fell silent again and, half laughingly, but without the least trace of vanity, declared: "Anyhow, I was quite different from the rest of them."

Jenny was in a brown study, stroking her little dog. How often in the past had she pictured Jacques as a disturbing, almost a dangerous personality! Now, however, she could not but admit her views had changed; he had ceased to be alarming.

Jacques was stretched out on the grass, staring in front of him, glad to have unburdened his heart so freely.

"Isn't it pleasant here under the trees?" he murmured lazily.

"Yes. What's the time?"

Neither of them had a watch. Anyhow, they were at the confines of the park and need not hurry. From the bench Jenny could see the tops of two familiar chestnut-trees and, further on, the cedar beside the forester's lodge, a tracery of palm-like foliage etched in black against the blue.

She bent towards the dog, which was crouching against her skirt, and took care not to look in Jacques's direction when next she spoke.

"Daniel has read me some of your poems."

His silence was so portentous that now she could not help stealing a glance at him. A blush had mounted from cheeks to brow, to the peak-point of his hair, and he was glaring angrily about him. She, too, began to blush.

"Oh, I shouldn't have told you that!" she exclaimed,

But already Jacques regretted his annoyance and was trying to overcome it; yet he could not bear to think that someone—and that someone, Jenny—should choose to judge him by his fumbling first attempts; he was all the more touchy on this count because he knew only too well that he had never done himself justice—a thought that never ceased to rankle in his mind.

"My poetry, why, it's—rubbish!" he exclaimed brutally. She did not protest or stir a finger; he was grateful for her reticence. "You must have a very poor opinion of me, if you … If anyone …" He broke off, then passionately exclaimed: "Oh, if anyone could guess the things I mean to do!" The all-absorbing topic, the woodland peace, Jenny's proximity, stirred him to such emotion that his voice faltered and his eyes began to smart as if he were on the brink of tears. "Take, for instance," he went on after a pause, "take the people who congratulate me on getting into the Ecole Normale. You can't imagine how I feel about all that! I'm ashamed of it. Yes, positively ashamed. Not merely ashamed of having got in at all, but of having bowed to … to the opinions of all those … If you knew what they really are, those people! All shaped in the same mould, by the same books. Books and books and books! And to think I had to cringe to them! I! That I gave in to their … Just imagine it!" Words failed him yet again. He fully realized that he had given no plausible motive for his aversion; the true and valid arguments for it had sunk their roots too deeply into his being to be dragged forth to order and paraded on the surface. "Yes, I despise the whole crowd of them!" he exclaimed. "And myself still more for having had any truck with them. No, I shall never, never—yes, it's unforgivable, all that!"

She kept her self-control the better for seeing him so uncontrolled. Though she had no clear insight into Jacques's mind, she had noticed that he often gave vent to a vague rancour of this sort, and his reluctance to forgive. How he must have suffered! Yet—and this was the difference between them—his faith in the future and happiness in store was unmistakable. A ceaseless undertone of hope and confidence pervaded his invectives; boundless as his ambition might seem, it was untouched by doubt. Hitherto Jenny had never speculated on Jacques's future, yet she was not surprised to learn that he aimed high, very high indeed; even in the days when she had thought of Jacques as a brutal, oafish schoolboy, she never failed to recognize that his was a force to be reckoned with. Today his feverish outburst and her glimpse of the dark fires that preyed upon his heart made her feel dizzy; it was as if she too were being drawn against her will into a maelstrom of emotions. So vivid was the sense of insecurity it gave her that she stood up to go.

"I'm awfully sorry," Jacques stammered nervously; "only, you see, I take these things so dreadfully to heart."

Taking a path that closely followed, like a sentinel's beat, each zigzag of the old-time fosse, they came to the further gate between the forest and the park; its iron grille bristled with spikes and the lock creaked like a dungeon bolt.

The sun was high, and it was only four o'clock; there was no necessity to end their walk so soon. What prompted them to choose a path that brought them home at once?

There were people strolling in the park and, though Jacques and Jenny had walked along the selfsame avenue on the previous day without the least self-consciousness, they both felt bashful now at the thought of being seen walking together by themselves.

"Listen," Jacques ventured when they came to a crossroads, "hadn't I better leave you now? What do you think?"

Her answer came promptly. "Oh, yes. I'm practically home now."

He stood before her, feeling—though he ignored the reason for it —rather ill at ease, forgetting even to raise his hat. Embarrassment brought back to his face the sullen, uncouth look that he so often wore but, during their walk, she had not once observed. He did not hold out his hand to her, but tried to smile and, just as he was turning away, ventured a timid glance in her direction.

"Oh, why," he murmured in a voice shaken by emotion, "why can't I always be … like this … with you?"

Jenny did not seem to hear, but walked straight on, without one look behind, across the grass. That last remark of his—was it not almost word for word what, since yesterday, she had been saying to herself time and time again? But suddenly a surmise that she hardly dared put into words flashed into thought; supposing Jacques had meant: "Why shouldn't I spend all my life with you beside me, as you've been today?" and the thought seared her mind like wildfire. She quickened her pace and fled for refuge to her bedroom; her limbs were trembling, her cheeks aflame, and she forbade herself to think.

The rest of her afternoon was spent in feverish bursts of energy; she reorganized her bedroom, changing the position of the furniture, tidied out the linen-cupboard on the landing, and replenished the flower-vases throughout the house. Now and again she picked up her little dog, hugged it to her breast and lavished caresses on it. When for the last time she glanced at the clock and it was certain Daniel would not be back for dinner, a mood of despair came over her. Unable to face the empty dining-room, she dined off a plate of strawberries on the terrace and, to escape the tedious agony of the dying day, took refuge in the drawing-room, where she lit all the lamps. She picked up a Beethoven album but, changing her mind, set it back on the shelf and ran to the piano with Chopin's *Etudes* under her arm… .

That evening daylight seemed exceptionally long in dying, for the moon had risen unseen behind the trees and, little by little, moonlight had effaced the last gleams of the sunset.

Without any definite plan in mind, Jacques slipped into his pocket the book of modern poems he had mentioned to Jenny. On such a night as this the tedium of the domestic scene was past endurance and he went out for a stroll into the park. He could not keep his wandering wits on any subject. In less than half an hour he found himself hurrying along the path between the acacias, with only one thought in his mind: Let's hope the gate hasn't been locked for the night!

It was not locked. When the bell tinkled he started like a trespasser caught red-handed. A warm, resinous fragrance, mingled with the acrid fume of anthills, drifted towards him from the shadow of the firs. Only the muted throb of a piano ruffled the stillness of the garden with faint sounds of life. Jenny and Daniel, he supposed, were having a musical evening together. The drawing-room lay on the far side of the house; all the windows facing Jacques were closed and the house seemed asleep. But, to his surprise, the roof was flooded with a ghostly light. Looking round, he saw the moon had risen above the tree-tops, spreading the tiles with a pale sheen and striking white fire from the dormer-windows. His heart beat faster as he neared the house; the thought of coming on them unawares abashed him, and he was relieved when Puce rushed up to him, barking. But there was no pause in the music; the sound of the piano must have drowned Puce's noisy greeting. Stooping, he took the little dog in his arms and lightly touched her silken forehead with his lips. Walking round a wing of the house, he reached the terrace onto which the tall French windows of the drawing-room opened. He moved towards the light, trying to recognize the piece that Jenny was playing. The melody seemed to hesitate, poised in mid-air between smiles and tears, to soar at last into an empyrean where joy and pain alike were meaningless.

When he reached the threshold it seemed as though the room were empty. At first he could see only the Persian shawl that draped the piano, and the knick-knacks standing on it. Then, in the gap between two vases, he made out a face, wraithlike in the misty candlelight— Jenny's face convulsed by the stresses of her inward vision. Her expression was so unstudied, so bare of all disguise, that he recoiled instinctively; it was as if he had surprised her naked.

Pressing the little dog to his shoulder and trembling like a thief, he waited outside the house Under cover of the shadows till she had finished playing. Then he called loudly to Puce to make it seem that he had just entered the garden.

Jenny started when she recognized his voice and stood up hurriedly. Her face still bore traces of the emotion felt in solitude, and her startled eyes parried Jacques's gaze, as though to keep inviolate their secret.

"I hope I didn't startle you," he said.

She frowned, but could not utter a word.

"Isn't Daniel back yet?" he asked, adding, after a pause: "Here's the anthology I spoke about this afternoon."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced the book. Taking it, she fluttered the pages mechanically, without sitting down or asking him to do so. Jacques realized that he had better go, and retreated to the terrace. Jenny followed.

"Please don't bother to see me to the gate," he stammered nervously.

But she persisted in accompanying him, for she fancied this the quickest, way to have done with it, and somehow did not dare hold out her hand and break off then and there. Once they were clear of the trees the moonlight was so bright that, when he turned to Jenny, he could see her eyelashes fluttering. The blue dress seemed unreal, spectral pale.

They crossed the garden in silence. Jacques opened the postern gate and stepped outside. Jenny followed him unthinkingly and stood in the middle of the narrow road, haloed with moonlight. Then, on the whitely gleaming wall, he saw a graceful shadow, Jenny's profile, neck, and chin, her plaited hair, even the set of her lips—like a silhouette cut in black velvet, exact in every detail. He pointed to it. Suddenly a fantastic notion stirred in his mind and, without giving himself time to reflect, ardent with the temerity that visits only timid natures, he bent towards the wall and kissed the shadow of the beloved face.

Jenny stepped back hastily, as though to wrest her shadow from his lips, and vanished through the doorway. The moonlit vista of the garden faded as the gate swung to. Jacques listened to her flying steps along the gravelled path and then he too launched himself into the darkness.

He was laughing.

Jenny ran and ran as though all the phantoms, black and white, haunting the eerie silence of the garden, were at her heels. She fled into the house, ran upstairs to her room, flung herself on the bed. She was shivering, in' a cold sweat, there was a pain at her heart, and she pressed her trembling hands against her bosom, crushing her forehead against the pillow. Her whole will was bent on one aim only: to forget. A sense of shame oppressed her, checking her rising tears. A feeling till then unknown had mastered her: fear of herself.

Downstairs Puce was barking; Daniel had come home.

Jenny heard him climb the stairs, humming a tune, and pause a moment at her door. No light showed through the chinks; thinking his sister was asleep, he dared not knock. But then—why were the drawing-room lamps alight? Jenny did not move; she wanted to be left alone, in the darkness. But, when she heard her brother's steps recede, an anguish gripped her heart and she jumped down from the bed.

"Daniel!"

The light of the lamp he was holding revealed her haggard face and staring eyes. It struck him that his late return must have alarmed his sister and he fumbled for excuses. She cut him short.

"No. I'm all nerves tonight." Her voice was shrill. "That friend of yours! I couldn't get rid of him, he kept following me, he stuck to me like a leech." White with rage, she rapped out every syllable. Then a sudden flush spread on her cheeks and she began to sob. Worn out by her emotion, she sank onto the edge of the bed. "Daniel, I beg you, tell him …! Send him away! I can't, no, I simply can't …!"

He stared at her perplexedly, struggling to guess what might have passed between them.

"But—what is it?" he murmured. A suspicion flitted across his mind, but he hardly dared give words to it. He screwed his lips into a forced smile. "Poor old Jacques!" he suggested tentatively. "Why, I shouldn't wonder if he's …"

He had no need to end the sentence; the tone conveyed his meaning well enough. To his surprise, Jenny betrayed no emotion; her eyes were lowered and she seemed indifferent. She was pulling herself together. When her silence had lasted so long that he had ceased to expect an answer, she spoke.

"Possibly." Her voice had regained its usual intonation.

So she's in love with him! Daniel thought, and so amazing was the discovery that it left him speechless, dumbfounded. But at that moment Jenny's eyes met his and read his thought. It spurred her to revolt; an angry light flashed into her blue eyes, her look grew challenging. She did not raise her voice, but her eyes bored into Daniel's and she shook her head peremptorily.

"Never! Never! Never!"

Daniel seemed unconvinced, and his face wore a look of affection and elder-brotherly concern that stung her like an insult; she went up to him, settled a vagrant lock of hair upon his forehead, and patted his cheek.

"Anyhow tell me, you old silly, have you had dinner yet?"

# IX

STANDING in front of the fireplace, in pyjamas, Antoine was chopping up a slab of plum-cake with a Malayan creese.

Rachel yawned.

"A thick one for me, Toine dear," she murmured lazily. She was lying on the bed, naked, her hands behind her head.

The window stood wide open but, mellowed by the drawn blind, the light inside the room was golden, like the warm twilight of a tent under the sun. Paris was sweltering in the blaze of an August Sunday. No sound came from the streets below and the house, too, was silent, empty perhaps but for the flat above; there, no doubt, Aline was reading the newspaper aloud for the benefit of Mme! Chasle and the little invalid who, though convalescent, had to lie flat for some weeks yet.

"I'm starving!" Rachel murmured, exhibiting an open mouth, pink as a cat's.

"The water can't have boiled yet."

"Doesn't matter. Give me one!"

He tipped a thick slice of cake onto the plate and placed it on the edge of the bed. Slowly, without rising, she slewed her head and shoulders round and, leaning on her elbow, with her head thrown back, began to eat, rolling pellets of cake between her fingers and letting them drop into her open mouth.

"How about you, dear?"

"Oh, I'll wait till the tea's ready," he replied, sinking among the cushions on the easy chair.

"Tired?"

He answered her with a smile.

The bed was low and open on all sides, and the alcove hung with curtains of pink silk, setting off Rachel's nakedness in all its splendour; she might have been some fabled daughter of the sea, ensconced within a glimmering shell.

"If I were a painter …" Antoine murmured.

"That settles it; you *must* be tired." A smile came and went on Rachel's face. "When you start being artistic, it always means you're tired."

She flung her head back, and her face, framed in the fiery halo of her hair, was lost in shadows. A pearly lustre emanated from her body. Her right leg lay in an easy, flowing curve upon the mattress, sinking a-little into it; the other, flexed and drawn up in the opposite direction, displayed the graceful outline of her thigh, lifting an ivory knee towards the sunlight.

"I'm hungry," she whimpered. But, when he went to the bed to fetch her empty plate, she flung her strong arms round his neck and drew his face towards her.

"Oh, that beard of yours!" she exclaimed, but did not let him go. "When shall we abate the nuisance?"

He stood up, cast an anxious look at the glass, and brought her another slice of cake.

"Yes, it's just that I like so much in you," he declared, watching her teeth close on an ample mouthful.

"My appetite?"

"No, your fitness. Your body with its splendid circulation. You're bracing, like a tonic… . I'm pretty well built, too," he added, and, turning to the mirror, viewed his reflected self. Squaring his shoulders, he straightened up his chest and puffed it out, but failed to realize how undersized his limbs appeared in proportion to his head; he always persuaded himself that his physique as a whole had the same look of vigour as the facial expression he had cultivated. During the past two weeks his sense of power and plenitude had been stimulated beyond all measure by the emotions love engendered. "Do you know," he concluded, "you and I are built to see a century through?"

"Together?" she whispered, with half-shut, tender eyes. And then a passing shadow dimmed her happiness: the dread that one day his appeal for her, the source of so much present joy, might lose its power.

Opening her eyes, she lightly stroked her legs, running her palms over the lissom skin.

"Personally," she declared, "if no one murders me, I'm certain to die old. Father was seventy-two when I lost him and he was hale as a man of fifty. He died quite by accident, really—the after-effects of a sunstroke. As a matter of fact it runs in our family, death by misadventure, I mean. My brother was drowned. I shan't die in my bed, either; a revolver-shot will be the end of me, I feel it in my bones."

"How about your mother?"

"Mother? She's very much alive. Every time I see her she looks younger. No wonder, of course, considering the life she leads." Her voice had a curious inflexion as she added: "She's shut up—at Saint Anne's."

"The asylum?"

"Hadn't I told you?" Her smile seemed almost apologetic and she made haste to satisfy his curiosity. "She's been there for seventeen years. I can hardly remember what she was like-—before. When one's only nine, you know … Anyhow she's cheerful,, doesn't seem to worry in the least, always singing. Yes, as a family, we're a tough lot! Look, the water's boiling!"

He hurried to the gas-ring and, while the tea was brewing, surveyed himself in the dressing-table glass, covering his beard with his hand to see how he would look clean-shaven. No. It suited him, that dark mass at the bottom of his face; it emphasized so well the pale rectangle of his forehead, the curve of his eyebrows, and his eyes. Moreover, some instinct made him chary of unmasking his mouth-almost as if it were a secret better kept concealed.

Rachel sat up to drink her tea, then lit a cigarette, and stretched herself again on the bed.

"Come near me. What are you up to, mooning about over there?"

Gaily he slipped beside her and bent above her face. In the warm alcove the perfume of her loosened hair enveloped him, honey-sweet yet piquant, clinging and almost cloying; sometimes he ached for it and sometimes turned away, for, if he inhaled it too long, it

left his throat and lungs filmed with a bitter-sweet aroma.

"What are you after now?" she asked.

"I'm looking at you."

"Toine darling!"

When their lips parted he bent over her again, gazing down at her with insatiable eyes.

"What on earth are you staring at like that?"

"I'm trying to make out your pupils."

"Are they so hard to find?"

"Yes; it's because of your eyelashes. They form a sort of golden haze in front of your eyes. That's what makes you look so …"

"So what?"

"So sphinx-like."

She gave a little shrug.

"My pupils are blue, if you want to know."

"So you say."

"Silvery blue."

"Not a bit of it!" He set his lips to Rachel's, then teasingly withdrew them. "Sometimes they look grey, and sometimes mauve. A muzzy sort of colour … blurred."

"Thanks very much!" Laughing, she rolled her eyes from side to side.

He gazed at her musingly. "Only a fortnight," he said to himself, "but it seems like months. Yet I couldn't have described the colour of her eyes. And her life—what do I know of it? Twenty-six years she's lived without me, in a world so different from mine. Years crowded with a host of things, adventurous years. Mysteries, too, that I'm beginning to discover, bit by bit." He would not admit the pleasure each discovery afforded him; still less give her an inkling of his pleasure. He never asked her anything, but she was always ready to talk about herself. He listened, ruminated, set facts and dates together, trying to understand, but above all amazed, taken aback at every turn. He was at pains to hide his wonder, but it was not chicanery that prompted him to do so. For years now his pose had been that of the man who understands everything; the only people he had learned to question were his patients. Surprise and curiosity were feelings that his pride had taught him to conceal, as best he might, under a mask of quiet interest and knowingness.

"One would think you'd never seen me before, the way you're staring at me today," she said. "That's enough, drop it now for goodness' sake!"

Under his scrutiny she was growing restive and, to escape it, shut her eyes. He began prising her lids apart with his fingers.

"Look here! That's quite enough of it! I won't have your eyes prying into mine like that." She crooked her arm over her eyes.

"So you want to keep me in the dark, little sphinx?" He sprinkled kisses on the shining, shapely arm, from shoulder to wrist.

Secretive, is she? he asked himself. No, a trifle reserved, but not secretive. Quite the contrary; she likes chattering about herself. In fact she gets more talkative every day. And that's because she loves me, he thought delightedly. Because she loves me… .

Putting her arm round his neck, she drew his face beside hers once more. When she spoke again, there was a graver note in her voice.

"That's a fact, you know; one has no idea how one can give oneself away in a mere look." She paused. He heard, deep down in her throat, the silent little laugh which so often preceded her evocations of the past. "That reminds me. … It was by his look, just the look on his face, that I hit upon the secret of a man with whom I'd been living for months. At a table, in a Bordeaux restaurant. We were facing each other, talking. Our eyes were going to and fro, from the plates to each other's face, or glancing round the room. Suddenly — I'll never forget it—for the fraction of a second I caught his eyes fixed on a point behind me, with an expression … I was so startled that I couldn't help turning in my chair to see."

"Well?"

"Well, that just shows, "she continued in a changed voice, "that one should mind the look in one's eyes."

"And what did you find out?" The question was on the tip of Antoine's tongue, but he dared not utter it. He had a morbid dread of making himself ridiculous by putting futile questions. Once or twice already he had ventured to ask for explanations at such moments and Rachel had looked at him with surprise, followed by amusement, laughing with an air of gentle mockery that deeply galled him.

So he held his tongue and it was she who broke the silence.

"All those old memories give me the blues. Kiss me. Again. Better than that." But evidently the subject had not left her thoughts, for she added: "As a matter of fact, I shouldn't have said 'his secret,' but 'one of his secrets.' You could never get to the bottom of that man's mind."

Then, to break away from the past and, perhaps, to elude Antoine's unspoken query, she rolled right over on the bed, with a slow, lithe, snake-like wriggle of all her body.

"How supple you are!" He stroked her body appreciatively, like a fancier stroking a thoroughbred.

"Yes? Did you know I'd had ten years' training at the Opera School of Dancing?"

"What? At Paris?"

"Yes, my boy! What's more, when I left I was a leading ballerina!"

"Was that long ago?"

"Six years."

"Why did you give it up?"

"My legs." Her face darkened for a moment. "After that, I almost joined a circus—as a trick-rider," she continued quickly. "Are you surprised?"

"Not a bit," he replied coolly. "What circus was it?"

"Oh, not a French one. A big international show that Hirsch was touring all over the world at the time. Hirsch, you know—that's the fellow I told you about, who's settled in the Sudan. He wanted to exploit my talent, but I wasn't taking any!" While she spoke, she amused herself crooking and straightening out each leg in turn with the effortless agility of a trained gymnast. "What gave him the

idea was that he'd persuaded me to try my hand at trick-riding some time before that, at Neuilly. I loved it. We had a fine stable then, and we made the most of it, you may be sure!"

"Were you living at Neuilly?"

"No; but he was. He owned the Neuilly riding-school in those days; he was always keen on horses. So was I. Are you?"

"I ride a bit," he replied, straightening his back. "But I haven't had many opportunities for getting on a horse—or the time for it."

"Well, I had opportunities all right. And to spare. Why, we were once on horseback for twenty-two days on end!"

"Where was that?"

"At the back of beyond. In Morocco."

"So you've been to Morocco?"

"Twice. Hirsch was selling obsolete Gras rifles to the tribes in the south, and an exciting job it was! Once there was a regular pitched battle round our camp. We were under fire for twenty-four hours; no, all night and the following morning. They don't often make night-attacks. It was a terrifying business; we couldn't see a thing. They killed seventeen of our bearers and wounded over thirty of them. I threw myself between the crates of rifles at each volley. But they got me all right!"

"What? You were wounded?"

"Yes." She laughed. "Only a scratch it was." She pointed to a silky scar on the line of her waist, just under the ribs.

"Why did you tell me you'd had a carriage-accident?" Antoine inquired unsmilingly.

"Oh," she exclaimed with a little shrug, "that was our first day together! You'd have thought I was trying to show off."

They were silent. So she's capable of lying to me, Antoine thought.

Rachel's eyes grew darkly pensive, then suddenly brightened again —but with a glint of hatred that quickly came and went.

"He'd got it into his head that I'd follow him anywhere and always. Well, he was wrong."

Antoine felt an uneasy satisfaction every time she cast such rancorous glances at her former life. "Stay with me—always!" he felt inclined to say. Pressing his cheek against the little scar, he waited. His ear, true to its professional training, followed the languid vascular flux and reflux murmuring deep down in her chest, and heard, remote yet clear, the full-toned throbbing of her heart. His nostrils quivered. On the warm bed all Rachel's body breathed the perfume of her hair, but subtler, more subdued; a faint yet maddening odour with a tang of spices in it, a humid fragrance redolent of a curious range of scents—hazel-leaves, fresh butter, pitchpine, and vanilla candy; less of a perfume, truth to tell, than a fine vapour, almost a flavour, leaving an aftertaste of spices on the lips.

"Let's drop the subject," she said. "Give me a cigarette. No, the ones on the little table. They're made by a girl I know; she puts a dash of green tea in with the Virginia leaf. They smell of burning leaves, camp-fires, and—yes, that's it—shooting-parties in September; the smell of gunpowder, you know, when you shoot the coverts and the smoke hangs in the mist."

He stretched himself out beside her under the smoke-rings, and his hands caressed the almost phosphorescent whiteness, hardly pink at all, of Rachel's belly, ample as a vase turned on the potter's wheel. She had acquired, probably in the course of her travels, the habit of eastern unguents and, in its maturity, her skin still kept the fresh and flawless smoothness of a young child's body.

"*Umbilicus sicut crater eburneus*," he murmured, recalling as best he could the sonorous Latin of the Vulgate which had so thrilled him in his sixteenth year. "*Venter tuus sicut*—like a what?—*sicut cupa*."

"What on earth does it mean?" She sat up on the bed. "Wait a bit! I'll try and guess. *Culpa*; I know that word. *Mea culpa*, that's it; a fault, a sin. 'Thy belly is a sin,' eh?"

He burst out laughing. Since she had come into his life, he no longer kept a hold on his high spirits.

"No, *cupa*. 'Thy belly is like a goblet,' " he amended, leaning his head on Rachel's hip, and proceeded with his slightly garbled versions of the Song of Solomon. "*Quam pulchrae sunt mammae tuce, soror mea*! 'How beautiful are thy two breasts, my sister!' Sicut duo (what's the Latin for them?) *gemelli qui pascuntur in liliis*. 'Like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.' "

Delicately she held them up, first one and then the other, with a tender little smile for each, as if they were two friendly little animals.

"They're awfully rare, you know, pink tips like that—really pink, like the buds on apple-trees," she declared with almost judicial gravity. "As a doctor, you must have noticed that."

"Yes, I believe you're right. A skin without pigmental granulation. White on white, with pink shadows." Shutting his eyes, he crushed himself against her. "Soft, soft shoulders …" he murmured sleepily. "I can't bear flappers with their skimpy little shoulders."

"Sure?"

"I love your delicious plumpness, every curve's so smooth and firm; its texture's like … like soap! Don't move; I'm so comfortable."

Suddenly a galling memory crossed his mind. "Like soap!" … A few days after Dedette's accident he had travelled with Daniel from Maisons to Paris. They were alone in the compartment. Antoine's mind was full of Rachel and the thought that now at last he could regale this expert amorist with an adventure of his own had proved too tempting; he could not contain himself, but launched into an account that lasted out the journey, of his dramatic night, the operation *in extremis*, the anxious vigil at the child's bedside, and his sudden passion for the handsome red-haired girl dozing beside him on the couch. Then he had used those very words, "delicious plumpness," "texture like soap." But he had not dared to tell Daniel of what followed; describing how, as he went down the stairs, he noticed Rachel's open door, he had added (less from motives of discretion than an absurd anxiety to prove his strength of will): "Did she expect me? Should I take the opportunity? Anyhow, I sized things up, pretended not to see, and passed the door. What would you have done in my place?" Then Daniel, who so far had heard him out in silence, looked him up and down, and rapped out: "Why, I'd have acted just as you did—you humbug!"

Daniel's exclamation echoed in his ears, sceptical, ironic, almost cutting, but with'just the touch of geniality it needed not to be effective. Whenever he recalled it, it stung him to the quick. A humbug! Well, of course he was apt to lie upon occasion; or, more accurately, to catch himself out lying… .

Meanwhile, that "delicious plumpness" had made Rachel think too.

"I'll grow into a fat old dame, quite likely," she said. "Jews, you know. . , . Still, my mother wasn't fat and I'm only half Yiddish. But you should have seen me sixteen years ago when I joined the beginners' class. A regular little pink mouse I looked!"

She slipped off the bed before he had a chance of stopping her.

"What's up?"

"I've got an idea… ."

"Anyhow you might give a fellow some warning."

"Least said, soonest mended." Laughing, she eluded his outstretched arm.

"Lulu dear … come back and sleep a bit," he murmured lazily.

"No more bye-bye today! Closing time!" She slipped into her wrap.

She ran to her desk, unlocked it, and pulled out a drawer full of photographs. Then she came back and sat on the edge of the bed, resting the drawer on her knees.

"I love looking over old photos. Some nights I take the whole collection to bed with me and spend hour after hour turning them over, thinking. Don't move! Have a look at them too, if it won't bore you."

Antoine, who had been lying curled up on the bed behind her, sat up at once; his interest was aroused and, resting his arms on the mattress, he settled into a comfortable position. As Rachel pored over her photographs he saw her in profile; her face had grown earnest and her drooping lashes showed like a faint filigree in pale gamboge along her slotted eyes. She had hastily put up her hair; against the light it shone like a chain-helmet woven of finespun silk, and almost orange-red; at every movement sparks seemed to flicker round her neck and at the corners of her temples.

"Here's the one I was hunting for. See that little ballet-girl? It's me! I got a rare telling-off that day, as a matter of fact, for spoiling the flounces of my ballet-skirt, crushing them against the wall like that. Aren't I weird with my elbows like pinpoints, my hair all over my shoulders, and that flat, high-cut bodice? I don't look over-cheerful, do I? Look here, that's me in my third year; my calves were filling out a bit. Here's the dancing-class, the bunch of us lined up along the practice-bar. Can you spot me amongst them? Yes, that's me. That's Louise over there—the name doesn't mean anything to you, eh? Well, you're looking at the famous Phytie Bella; we went through the school together and in those days she was just plain Louise to us. Louis, for short. We ran neck and neck for the first place. Yes, I might have been their star dancer today, only for my phlebitis… . Like to have a look at Hirsch? Ah, now you're interested, I can see. Here he is. What do you think of him? I'm sure you didn't guess he was so old. But, for all that he's fifty, there's lots of kick in the old dog yet, you may take my word for it. Loathsome creature! Look at that neck, that bull's neck of his wedged between his shoulders; when he turns his head all the rest goes round with it. At first sight you might take him for almost anything—a horse-trader, or a trainer, perhaps—don't you think so? His daughter was always saying to him: 'Your Royal Highness reminds me of a slave-dealer!' That used to start him laughing every time, with that fat belly-laugh of his. But they're worth looking at—his skull and that hook nose like a hawk's, the curve of his lips. Ugly, I grant you, but he's got *style*, all right. Just look at his eyes; he'd seem even more of a brute if it wasn't for that—well, the kind of eyes he has; I don't know how to describe them. And doesn't he look self-confident, a real tough customer, hot-tempered, too? What? Hot-tempered and sensual as they're made. How that man loves life! For all my loathing of him I can't help saying what one says of some kinds of bulldog: 'He's so ugly that he's a beauty!' Don't you agree? Look, that's Papa! Papa with his work-girls round him. That's how he always was: in his shirt-sleeves, with his little white beard and scissors dangling. He'd build you a fancy dress with a couple of dish-rags and half a dozen pins. That was taken in the workroom. Do you see the draped manikins at the end of the room, and the designs on the walls? He'd been appointed costumier at the Opera and given up working for private customers. Just go and ask the Opera people what they thought of old man Goepfert in those days! When my mother had to be put away and he and I were left alone, he wanted to take me on as his partner, poor old fellow; he meant to leave the business to me. A good paying business it was; it's thanks to it that I can get along now without working. But you know how it would affect a kid— seeing actresses about the place all day. I had only one ambition: to be a dancer. He let me have my way; what's more, he got old Mme. Staub to take me under her wing, and it was a real joy to him to see me getting on so well at it. He was always harping on my career. Well, it's a good thing the poor old boy can't see how I've gone downhill since those days. I cried, you know, when I had to give up dancing. Women as a rule haven't much ambition; they take things as they come. But on the stage we're at it all the time—struggling to make good; and one soon gets to enjoy the struggle as much as one's actual successes. So it seems the end of the world when one has to say goodbye to all that and live a humdrum life with nothing to look forward to. Look, here are my travel photos! All in a jumble, of course! There we're having lunch; I'm not sure where—in the Carpathians, I think. Hirsch was on a shooting-trip. He sported a long, drooping moustache in those days; rather like a Sultan, isn't he? The Prince always addressed him as 'Mahomed.' Do you see that sunburnt fellow standing behind me? It's Prince Peter, who became King of Servia. He gave me the two white whippets lying down in front; see the way they're curled up—just like you! That man there who's laughing, don't you think he's very like me? Look hard! No? Well, it's my brother all the same. He was dark, like Papa, while I take after Mother—fair; well, it's auburn, if you like. Don't be so absurd! Oh, well, have it your own way; carroty! But I've inherited my father's character, and my brother took after Mother. Look, he comes out better in this one… . I've no photo of Mother, not one; Papa destroyed the lot. He never spoke of her to me, or took me to Saint Anne's. But all the same he used to go and see her there, himself, twice a week; year in, year out, he never missed a visit. The attendants told me about it later. He used to sit there in front of her for an hour—sometimes longer. Quite futile it was, as she didn't recognize him or anyone else. But he simply adored her. He was much older than she. He never got over the worry she gave him. One evening, I remember it so well, Papa was sent for, at the workroom, as Mother'd been arrested. She had been caught stealing from a counter at the Louvre Stores. What a to-do! Mme. Goepfert, the costume-maker at. the Opera—just think! They found a child's jersey and a pair of socks in her muff. She was released at once; a fit of kleptomania, they said. You know all about that of course. That was the beginning of her breakdown. Well, my brother took after her in many ways. He got into dreadful trouble with a bank. Hirsch helped him out. But he'd have gone Mother's way sooner or later, if there hadn't been that accident. No, leave that one alone! Drop it, there's a good man! I tell you, it's not a photo of me; it's … it's a little godchild, who died. Look at this one instead. It's … it was taken … just outside Tangiers. No, don't take any notice, Toine dear, it's over now; I've stopped crying, can't you see I've stopped? The Bubana plain, our camp by the Si Guebbas caravanserai. That's me; beside the Marabout of Sidi-Bel-Abbés. Do you see Marrakesh in the background? What do you think of this one? It was taken near Missum-Missum, or it might be Dongo; I can't remember. Those are two Dzem chiefs, and a rare job I had taking 'em! They're cannibals; oh, yes, they still exist, all right! Now that's a ghastly one! Look, don't you see? Just there, that little heap of stones. Got it? Well, there's a woman beneath that heap. Stoned to death. Horrible, isn't it? Try to imagine it—a decentish sort of woman whom her husband had

deserted for no earthly reason three years before. He'd vanished and, as she thought he was dead, she'd married again. Two years later he came back. Bigamy in those tribes is reckoned the crime of crimes. So they stoned her. Hirsch made me come to Meched just to see it, but I took to my heels and stayed half a mile away. I'd seen the woman dragged through the village the morning before the execution, and that was sickening enough, I assure you. But he saw it out; yes, he pushed his way to the front. Listen! It seems they dug a hole, a very deep hole, and led the woman to it. She lay down in it of her own accord, without saying a word. Would you believe it? She didn't utter a sound, but the crowd were yelling for her death so loudly that I could hear them, even at that distance away. Their high priest gave the lead. First of all he read out the sentence. Then he picked up a huge boulder and hurled it with all his force into the hole. Hirsch told me she didn't utter a cry. That started the crowd off. They'd big piles of stones stacked up ready, and each of them took what he wanted there and flung his quota into the hole. Hirsch swore to me that, for his part, he didn't throw any. When the hole was full— brimming over, as you can see—they stamped it down, yelling all the time, and then they all decamped. Hirsch insisted on my coming back to take a snapshot, as it was I who had the camera. I had to give in. Why, even now the mere thought of it sets my heart palpitating—don't you feel it? There she lay, under those stones. Dead, most likely… . No, not that one! Hands off!"

Antoine, craning his neck over Rachel's shoulder, had just time to catch a glimpse of tangled, naked limbs before Rachel deftly clapped her hands over his eyes. The warmth of her palms upon his eyelids brought back to him, with less of feverish insistence but in all else the same, her gesture at the climax of her ecstasy, to veil from her lover's eyes the passion on her face. He made a playful effort to free himself. Suddenly she sprang down from the bed, pressing to her dressing-gown a sheaf of photographs tied up together. Laughing, she ran to the desk, slipped the package into a drawer, and turned the key.

"For one thing," she explained, "they aren't mine. I've no rights over them at all."

"Whose are they?"

"They belong to Hirsch."

She returned and sat at Antoine's side.

"Now will you promise to be sensible? I'll carry on, then. Sure you're not bored? Look here; that's another travel picture of sorts. A donkey-ride in the Saint-Cloud woods. As you can see, those kimono sleeves were just coming in. That was a fetching little dress I had on, wasn't it now?"

# X

ALWAYS, Mme. de Fontanin mused, I am lying to myself; were I to face the facts, I'd give up hope.

Standing at a window of the drawing-room, she observed across the silk-net curtain the trio in the garden—Jerome, Daniel, and Jenny—pacing to and fro.

"How easily even the most honest of us can make themselves at home in a world of lies!" she murmured. But, just as she so often failed to hold in check a rising smile, so now she could not stem the tide of happiness that, wave on wave, came surging through her heart.

Leaving the window she went out to the terrace. It was the hour when eyes grow tired of trying to discern the forms of things; on an iridescent sky some pale and early stars were glimmering. Mme. de Fontanin sat down, letting her eyes linger for a moment on the familiar scene. Then she sighed. Only too well she knew Jerome would not continue living at her side as for the past fortnight he had done; that this renewal of their home-life would prove short-lived as ever. For did she not discern, with mingled joy and apprehension, in his whole attitude towards her, yes, even in his sedulous affection, the selfsame Jerome whom she had always known? Did it not prove that he had never changed and soon would leave her once again? Already the crestfallen, ageing Jerome whom she had brought back home with her from Holland, the husband who had clung to her for succour like a drowning man, was changed out of recognition. Even now, though in her presence he might affect the manner of a contrite child, and despite the seemly sighs of resignation that escaped him when he remembered his bereavement—even now he had unpacked a summer suit, and (though he was unaware of it) was looking vastly younger. "Why not call for Jenny at the club this morning? That will give you a nice walk," she had suggested. True, he had feigned indifference; yet he had risen without demur, and presently she had seen him walking briskly away, in white flannel trousers and a light coat, holding himself erect. Yes, she had even caught him picking a sprig of jessamine for his buttonhole!

Just then Daniel, who had noticed that his mother was alone, came up to her. Since Jerome's return Mme. de Fontanin had felt rather ill at ease in her relations with her son. Daniel had noticed this and, as a result, was coming oftener to Maisons and doing his utmost to show himself more attentive than ever to his mother. He wished to make it clear to her that he quite grasped the situation, and blamed her not at all.

Stretching himself full length in a low deck-chair, his favourite seat, he lit a cigarette and smiled towards his mother… . How like his father's are his hands and gestures! she thought.

"Will you be leaving us again tonight, dear boy?"

"Yes, Mother, I must. I've an appointment early tomorrow morning."

He fell to talking of his work—a thing he rarely did; he was preparing for the autumn season a special number of Progressive Art, devoted to the newest schools of European painting, and found the choice of the abundant illustrations that would accompany the text a thrilling task. But the theme was soon talked out.

The silence was murmurous with the vague sounds of evening, and the shrill chorus of the crickets in the forest fosse below the terrace dominated all the rest. Now and again a vagrant breeze wafted towards them from the firs a tang of toasted spices, rustled the fibrous plane-leaves and shreds of bark across the sand. Swiftly, on flaccid wings, a bat swooped down and lightly brushed Mme. de Fontanin's hair; she could not repress a cry of alarm.

"Will you be here on Sunday?" she asked.

"Yes, I'll come back tomorrow and stay two days."

"You should ask your friend to lunch. I met him, by the by, in the village, yesterday." And, partly because she really thought it, partly because she credited Jacques with all the qualities she thought to see in Antoine, and—last, but not least—wishing to please her son, she added: "What a sincere, noble-minded fellow he is! We had quite a long walk together."

Daniel's face fell, for he remembered Jenny's outburst the evening after her walk with Jacques across the forest.

What an ill-developed, ill-starred, ill-balanced mind Jenny has! he mused regretfully; old beyond her years with thought and solitude and reading! Yet she knows nothing, nothing at all of life. But what can I do? She doesn't trust me now, as she used to. If only she had a solid constitution! But she's all nerves, like a little girl. And full of romantic ideas! She refuses to explain herself, prefers to fancy she's "misunderstood." A sort of uncommunicative pride it is, that's poisoning her life; or is it only a hang-over from the awkward age?

He rose from his chair and moved to his mother's side, feeling it his duty to let her know.

"Tell me, Mother, have you noticed anything special in Jacques's attitude towards you … and towards Jenny?"

"Towards Jenny?" Mme. de Fontanin echoed Daniel's words and, as they sank into her consciousness, they seemed to crystallize around a dim, unformulated fear. Less than a fear, perhaps—one of the transient impressions whose purport her keenly sensitive mind had noted, but without putting it into words. A spasm of anguish gripped her heart; and at once her faith took wing towards the Spirit. "Forsake us not!" she prayed.

The others came up to them.

"Hadn't you better cover yourself up a bit more, sweetheart?" Jerome exclaimed. "You must be careful; it's turned much cooler than usual this evening."

He went to the hall and fetched a scarf, which he wrapped round his wife's shoulders. It happened that the long wicker chair in which, on the doctor's orders, Jenny rested after meals had been left under the plane-trees. No sooner did Jerome catch sight of her, dragging it across the sand, than he hurried to her aid and helped her to settle down in it.

But he had found it a none too easy task to tame her wild bird's nature. The bond uniting Jenny with her mother had been so close throughout her early years that, even as a mere child, she had always judged her father without lenience. Jerome, however, delighted

with his new-found daughter just ripening into womanhood, had been all attention, cajoled her with his subtlest methods of approach, and with so good a grace, such tact, that Jenny had been touched. Today, indeed, father and daughter had talked without reserve, like bosom friends, and Jerome was still tingling with the emotion he had felt.

"The air is fragrant with your roses this evening, sweetheart," he said, as he dropped languidly into a rocking-chair and set it swaying. "The Gloire de Dijon round the dovecot's a blaze of flowers."

Daniel stood up.

"Time to be off," he said and, going up to his mother, kissed her forehead.

She took the young man's face between her hands and for a moment scanned it closely, murmuring:

"My own big boy!"

"D'you know, I think I'll go with you as far as the station," Jerome suggested. The morning's escapade had whetted his appetite for brief evasions from the garden where, for a fortnight now, he had been leading a cloistered life. "Won't you come too, Jenny?"

"I'll stay with Mamma."

"Got a cigarette?" asked Jerome, taking Daniel's arm. Since his return he had eschewed tobacco rather than go out and buy it.

Mme. de Fontanin watched the two men's receding figures; Jerome's voice came wafted back to her.

"Do you think I can get Turkish tobacco at the station?" Then they disappeared behind the fir-trees.

Jerome pressed to his side the arm of this good-looking youth, his son. Any young creature had an intense appeal for him; intense, yet barbed with keen regret. Each day he spent at Maisons quickened his distress; time and again the sight of Jenny evoked—how cruelly!— his own lost youth. And, at the tennis-club, with what self-pity had he watched them—young men and girls, bright-eyed, their hair in disorder, their collars open and their clothes "all anyhow," yet for all that flaunting the glorious panoply of youth! Lithe bodies, steeped in sunlight, whose very sweat was wholesome, redolent of health. In ten brief minutes he had realized in all its bitterness the handicap of his declining years. He was shamed and sickened by the thought that henceforth, day in day out, he must wage war against himself, against decrepitude and dirt, the noisesomeness of age; against the premonitions of that ultimate decay which had already set its mark upon his body. The contrast between his heavy gait, shortness of breath, and struggles to keep brisk, and his son's limber strides appalled him; releasing Daniel's arm, he gave vent to an envious cry.

"What wouldn't I give to be your age, my boy!"

Mme. de Fontanin had made no protest when Jenny volunteered to keep her company.

"You're looking fagged out, darling," she said when they were alone. "Perhaps you'd rather go up to bed at once?"

"Oh, no!" Jenny replied. "The nights are quite long enough as it is."

"Aren't you sleeping well just now?"

"Not too well."

"But why not, darling?"

The tone of Mme. de Fontanin's voice conveyed more than a casual question. Jenny looked at her mother in surprise, and it dawned on her that something lay behind the words, an explanation was being asked of her. Instinctively she decided to elude it; though not secretive, she shrank from any effort to draw her out.

Mme. de Fontanin had not the art of subterfuge and the look she now cast on her daughter in the dying light was plain to read. If only the affection in her eyes might break the barrier of reticence that Jenny had set up between them! m

"As for once in a way we're alone," she began—there was a hint of emphasis in her tone, as though she begged the girl's forgiveness for the inroads Jerome's return had made upon their intimacy— "there's something I'd like to speak to you about, darling. I'm thinking of the Thibault boy, whom I met yesterday… ." She paused; after this frontal attack on her subject, she was puzzled how to proceed. But her anxious air as she bent towards the girl spoke for the unspoken words, pointed a tacit question.

Jenny said nothing and Mme. de Fontanin slowly drew herself up, fixing her eyes upon the darkening garden.

Five minutes passed. The breeze freshened and Mme. de Fontanin imagined she saw Jenny shiver.

"You're catching cold. Let's go in."

Her voice had regained its normal intonation. A new idea had come to her: what was the use of insisting? Glad she had spoken out and sure she had been understood, she faced the future confidently.

Mother and daughter rose and crossed the hall without a word, then climbed the stairs in almost total darkness. Mme. de Fontanin, who was in front, waited on the landing at Jenny's door to kiss her goodnight as usual. Though she could not see the girl's face, she felt her body, as she kissed her, stiffening with revolt, and for a moment held the young cheek pressed to hers, in a movement of compassion which made Jenny recoil instinctively. Mme. de Fontanin gently released her, then moved away towards her own bedroom. But then she noticed that, instead of opening the door and entering her room, Jenny was following; just as she was about to turn she heard the girl's excited voice behind her, exclaiming passionately, in one breath:

"You've only got to treat him a bit more stiffly, Mamma, if you think he comes here too often."

"Treat whom?" Mme. de Fontanin stared at her daughter. "Jacques? If he comes too often? But he hasn't shown up for a fortnight or more!"

(Jacques's non-appearance was deliberate; learning from Daniel of M. de Fontanin's return and the disturbing factor it had proved in their home-life, he had thought it more tactful to keep away altogether for the present. Jenny, too, went far less often to the club and, when she did so, avoided Jacques as much as possible, waiting till he was playing in a set to slip away before he had a chance of saying more than a casual word to her. The result was that the two young people had seen very little of each other during the past fortnight.) Jenny deliberately entered her mother's bedroom; shutting the door, she stood there, unspeaking, in an attitude of resolute courage. Mme. de Fontanin's heart thrilled with pity; her one thought was to make it easy for Jenny to speak out.

"I assure you, darling, I really can't see what you mean."

"Why did Daniel ever bring those Thibaults to our place?" Jenny broke out passionately. "Nothing would have happened if Daniel hadn't, for some fantastic reason, taken such a liking for those people."

"But what *has* happened, darling?" Mme. de Fontanin's heart beat quicker.

Jenny flared up.

"Nothing! Nothing has happened! That's not what I meant. But, if Daniel and you, too, Mamma, hadn't always been pressing those Thibaults to come here, I, I wouldn't …" Her voice gave way.

Mme. de Fontanin summoned up all her courage.

"Please, Jenny dear, tell me about it. Do you think you've noticed that … that … well, that he feels in a special way towards …?" She did not need to end her question, for Jenny had lowered her head in a gesture of mute assent. Once again the moonlit garden, the little door, her profile on the wall, and Jacques's outrageous gesture rose before Jenny's eyes; but she was firmly resolved to breathe no word about the dreadful incident whose memory still haunted her nights and days. It was as though, by keeping the secret locked in her breast, she reserved to herself the choice of treating it as a source of horror, or simply of emotion.

Mme. de Fontanin knew that the crucial moment had come; she must not let Jenny build up once again a wall of' silence between them. Resting a trembling hand on the table behind her to steady herself, the poor woman bent towards Jenny, whose face she could just barely discern in the faint glimmer coming from the open window.

"Darling," she said, "there's no need to take it to heart unless you, too … unless you are …"

An emphatic gesture of denial, repeated several times, was her answer. Now that the agony of doubt was past, Mme. de Fontanin heaved a sigh of relief.

"I've always loathed the Thibaults!" Jenny suddenly exclaimed in a tone her mother had never heard from her before. "The elder one's no better than a conceited lout, and the other …"

"That's not true," Mme. de Fontanin cut in, and in the darkness her cheeks glowed fiery red.

"And the other one has always been Daniel's evil genius," Jenny added, harking back to an early grievance which even she had long ago discarded as unjust. "No, Mamma, please don't stick up for them. You *can't* like them—they're so utterly different from you. They are—I don't know what! Even when they seem to think like us, we shouldn't let ourselves be taken in; they always think differently, and from different motives. As a family, they're …" She groped for an epithet. Then, "They're loathsome!" she exclaimed. "Loathsome!" Her mind was in a turmoil which now she made no effort to control. "No, Mamma," she continued in the same breath, "I don't want to hide anything from you. Nothing! Well, when I was quite little, I think I had a nasty sort of feeling towards Jacques, a sort of jealousy. It upset me to see Daniel making such a fuss over him. 'He's not good enough for my brother," I used to think. 'He's vain and selfish. A sulky, jeering, ill-bred schoolboy! Only to look at him—that mouth of this, the shape of his jaws!' I tried to keep him out of my thoughts. But I couldn't; he'd always let fly some cutting remark that made me furious, that rankled! Then he was always coming to our place-it looked as if he made a point of hanging round me. But that's all ancient history. I can't think why I'm always coming back to it. Since those days I've observed him more closely. This year, especially—this last month. I've come to see him in another way. I try to be fair. I'm not blind to his good points, such as they are. There's something I must tell you, Mamma; sometimes I've imagined, yes, it's struck me sometimes that I, too—without realizing it—I felt somehow … drawn towards him. No, that's impossible! It isn't true a bit! I loathe everything about him … almost everything."

"About Jacques," Mme. de Fontanin admitted, "I can't be sure. You've had more opportunities than I of judging what he is. But, as far as Antoine's concerned, I can assure you-"

"No," the girl broke in impulsively.. "I never said that Jacques was … I mean, I've never denied that he's got very fine qualities too." Little by little her voice had changed and she now spoke calmly. "To begin with, you can tell that he's extremely clever by everything he says. I admit that. I'll go even further; his nature isn't warped, he can be not merely sincere, but generous, noble-minded. So you see, Mamma, I'm not at all biased against him. What's more, I firmly believe"—she spoke with such deep conviction that Mme. de Fontanin was taken aback and gazed at her intently—"I believe that a great future awaits him, perhaps a very great one indeed. So now you can't say that I'm unjust to him. Why, I'm almost convinced that the driving force behind him is nothing less than what is known as 'genius'; yes, just that, genius!" The word, as she repeated it, rang like a challenge, though her mother had shown no sign of contradicting her.

Then suddenly she cried out in a paroxysm of despair:

"But all that doesn't change anything! He has a Thibault's character—he *is* a Thibault! And I hate them all!"

Mme. de Fontanin was stupefied, bereft of speech.

"But … Jenny …!" at last she murmured.

Jenny perceived behind her mother's exclamation the selfsame meaning as that which she had read so clearly on Daniel's face. With childish impetuosity she darted forward and put her hand over her mother's mouth.

"No! No! It isn't that. I tell you it isn't that!"

Then as her mother clasped her to her breast, safe in the shelter of her mother's arms, Jenny felt suddenly the stranglehold of sorrow loosening at her throat; now at last she could sob her heart out, repeating over and over again, in the small voice of her childhood when something had upset her:

"Mummy dear … oh, Mummy!"

And Mme. de Fontanin soothed her like a child upon her breast, murmuring vague consolations.

"Darling … don't be frightened… . Don't cry… . There's nothing to worry about. No one's going to force you to … Everything's quite all right, so long as you don't …" For a memory had flashed through her mind of the occasion when she had met M. Thibault, the morning after the two boys had run away from home; she seemed to see him again, big and burly, with the two priests on either side of him. And now she pictured him refusing to countenance Jacques's love and desecrating Jenny's with cruel scorn. "Oh, I'm so glad there's nothing in it. And you mustn't blame yourself the least little bit. I'll talk to him myself; I'll see the boy and make him understand. Don't cry, darling. You'll forget all about it. There, there, it's all over… . Don't cry any more."

But Jenny sobbed more and more violently; each of her mother's words dealt a new stab at her heart. For a long while they stayed thus in the darkness, closely enfolded; the girl nursing her sorrow in her mother's arms, the mother murmuring cruel consolations, with staring, panic-stricken eyes. For, with her wonted prescience, she foresaw the path of destiny that Jenny must follow ineluctably; no fears of hers, not love, not even prayer could avert its menace from her child. For, as the whole creation moves on its slow upward progress to the spiritual plane—the thought appalled her!—each of us must make his way alone, from trial to trial—often enough from error to error—along the path which has been appointed him from all eternity. At last the sound of the front-door closing and Jerome's steps in the tiled hall startled them into movement. Jenny hurriedly let fall her arms and fled to her room, stumbling as though a load of grief were laid on her frail shoulders, a burden no one in the world could ever lighten.

# XI

A GIGANTIC poster, flaunted on the boulevard, brought passers-by to a full stop before the picture-house.

IN DARKEST AFRICA

TRAVELS AMONGST THE SAVAGE TRIBES OF THE INTERIOR

"It doesn't begin till half-past eight," Rachel sighed.

"I told you so."

Not without regret had Antoine forgone the privacy of the pink bedroom, and now, to console himself with an illusive isolation, he booked one of the shut-in boxes at the back of the amphitheatre.

While he was doing so, Rachel came back to him.

"I say, I've just spotted a real beauty!" she cried, and led him to the lobby, where stills from the film were being exhibited. "Look there!"

Antoine read the caption first: "A Mundang girl winnowing millet on the banks of the Mayo Kebbi." Then his eyes rose to a bronzed body, stark naked but for a ribbon of plaited straw knotted round the loins. Intent upon her task, the girl, resting her weight on her right leg, her bust strained upwards, her right arm rising in a sweeping curve above her head, had the poised beauty of a statuette. In her right hand she held a tilted calabash filled with grain that she was pouring in a thin trickle, from as high as she could reach, into a wooden bowl below, clasped in her left hand at the level of her knee. Nothing was studied in her attitude; the poise of her head, flung back a little, the balanced harmony of her curving arms, the upward surge of the torso, tip-tilting the firm young breasts, the flexure of her waist and tension of her hip, the forward swing of the unweighted limb that lightly spurned the soil at its extremity—all breathed harmonious beauty, adjusted to the rhythms of toil, an artless counterpoint of movements.

"Look, what do you think of that?" She pointed to a file of ten young Negroes bearing on their shoulders a tapering pirogue. "Isn't that little fellow lovely? He's a Wolof, you know. That's a *grigri* he has round his neck, and he's wearing a blue *boubou* and a tarboosh." Her voice was vibrant with unwonted excitement that evening and, when she smiled, her lips all but refused to part, as though the muscles of her face had stiffened unawares. Her eyes moved restlessly between the narrowed lids, fever-bright and lit with silvery gleams; never had Antoine seen them thus before.

"Let's go in," she suggested.

"But there's a good quarter of an hour before it starts."

"That doesn't matter!" she insisted, like an impatient child. "Let's go in now."

The house was empty. In the orchestra pit some musicians were tuning up. As Antoine began to raise the lattice-window in front of the box Rachel pressed herself to his side.

"Do loosen your tie!" she pleaded laughingly. "You always look as if you'd just been trying to throttle yourself and dashed off with the rope round your neck." Letting the window fall, Antoine made a vague gesture of petulance. "Yes," she murmured in the same breath, "I'm ever so glad you're with me to see this show." Prisoning Antoine's face between her hands, she drew it to her lips. "You've no idea how much I love you now that beard of yours is gone!"

She took off her hat, gloves, and cloak, and they sat down. Across the lattice which screened them from the public, they saw the theatre coming to life under their eyes; from a mute, dingy cavern, bathed in dim red light, whence here and there emerged a speck of human flotsam, it became a seething mass of life, a busy aviary whose twitterings were sometimes drowned by a chromatic scale from some wind instrument. The summer had been exceptionally hot, but the latter half of September had brought many Parisians home again perforce, and even now the Paris of high summer, which Rachel delighted in exploring like a new-found city year by year, had ceased to be.

"Listen!" she said. The orchestra had begun to play the spring-song from the Walküre. Antoine was sitting very close beside her, and her head drooped on his shoulder; from Rachel's lips, through her closed lips, there came to him an echo as it were of the melody the violins were playing.

"Have you ever heard Zucco, the tenor?" she inquired casually.

"Yes. Why?"

Lost in a daydream, she did not reply at once; at last she whispered under her breath, as if a belated scruple forbade her keeping him in the dark:

"He was my lover once."

Though in no way jealous, Antoine was keenly curious about Rachel's past. He realized exactly what she meant by her remark: "My body has no memory." All the same—that fellow Zucco! What a figure of fun he'd looked in his white satin doublet, perched on a sort of wooden crate, in the third act of the *Meistersinger*; a fat and stocky oaf who, for all his yellow wig, looked like a gipsy and, in the love-duets, splayed his fat fingers against his heart. Antoine was rather vexed that Rachel should have stooped so low as that!

"Have you heard him sing it?" she asked, while her fingers traced in air the sinuous curves of melody. "I never told you about Zucco, did I?"

"No."

He was pressing Rachel's hand against his breast and need only look down to observe her face. She had not the lively air habitual with her when she evoked the past; her eyebrows were a little knitted, her eyelids all but closed, and the corners of her mouth were

drooping. “How well the cast of grief would fit her face!” he said to himself. Then, struck by her silence, and anxious once again to prove he took no umbrage at her past, he put a leading question:

“Well, what about your Signor Zucco?”

She started.

“Zucco?” she repeated with a faint smile. “Well, you know, there’s little enough to tell, really. He was number one, that’s all.”

“And where do I come on the list?” The question cost him a slight effort.

“Why, number three, of course,” she replied coolly.

A threesome, Antoine mused: Zucco, Hirsch, and I. Only a threesome?

She seemed to wake up suddenly.

“You want to hear more? But there’s nothing in it, really. It was just after Papa’s death; my brother had a job at Hamburg. I was busy at the Opera all day and every day, but the nights I wasn’t dancing I felt rather lonely—you know how one is at eighteen. Zucco had been after me for ages. I didn’t think much of him; he was inclined to put on airs.” She hesitated. “A bit of an ass, really. Yes, I rather think that even then I found him rather maudlin. But I never guessed he was a brute as well!” she suddenly burst out.

The lights had just gone down; she glanced round the theatre.

“What comes first?”

“News-reels.”

“Then?”

“A Wild West film—rotten, I expect.”

“And Africa?”

“Last of all.”

“Oh, well,” she murmured, resting again her fragrant hair on Antoine’s shoulder, “you can tell me if there’s anything worth watching… . Sure I don’t tire you, Toine dear, like that? I’m ever so comfy.”

He saw her glistening, parted lips, and pressed his mouth to her mouth’s kiss.

But, when he mentioned Zucco’s name again, to his surprise the smile died from her face.

“Now I look back on it,” she said, “I can’t imagine how I ever stood the way he treated me—worse than a brutal drover treats his cattle! He’d been a muleteer, as it happens, in Oran. All the other girls were sorry for me; no one could make out why I put up with him; in fact I can’t understand it myself. Of course, so they say, some women like being knocked about… .” She was silent for a while, then added: “No; it must have been because I so dreaded being alone again.”

Never before within his memory had Antoine heard such sadness in Rachel’s voice. He drew his arms more closely round her, as if to shelter her from the rough world. But then his embrace grew weaker; he was thinking of his over-readiness to pity—a facet, doubtless, of his pride, and, perhaps, the secret of his devotion to his young brother. Indeed he had sometimes wondered—before Rachel crossed his path—if he were capable of any other form of love.

“And then?”

“Then it was he who dropped me… . Needless to say,” she added, without a trace of bitterness.

After an interval she continued in a lower voice, as though she wanted the avowal to pass in silence:

“I was going to have a baby.”

Antoine was dumbfounded. Rachel had been a mother! Impossible! Was it credible that he, a doctor, should have failed to note the signs …? Preposterous!

His eyes strayed, fretful and bemused, towards the captions reeling out before him:

THE ARMY MANCEUVRES
*M. Fallieres converses with the German Military Attaché.*

THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE OF THE FUTURE
*Latham lands in his monoplane with important dispatches for the Commander-in-Chief.*
*The intrepid airman is greeted by the President of the Republic.*

“Oh, that wasn’t his only reason for dropping me,” Rachel explained. “If I’d gone on paying his bills …”

Antoine suddenly remembered the photograph of a baby which he had seen at her place, and her words as she snatched it away from him: “It’s a little godchild, who died.”

He was less astonished by Rachel’s revelation than aggrieved at it, piqued in his professional self-esteem.

“Is that really so?” he murmured. “You had a child?” Then quickly added with a knowledgeable smile: “Of course I had guessed as much, some time ago.”

“Still, it doesn’t show a lot, does it? I took no end of trouble about myself—because of my job at the theatre.”

“But a doctor’s eyes, you know!” He gave a slight shrug.

She smiled. Antoine’s perspicacity made her still prouder of him. For some moments she was silent and when she spoke again her voice had the same languorous tone.

“When I think of those days, you know, Toine dear, I feel that the best of my life lies behind me. How proud I was about it! And when I was getting a bit ungainly and had to ask them at the Opera for a holiday, guess where I went! To Normandy. A little village at the back of beyond, where an old woman who’d been our nurse, my brother’s and mine, was living. What a fuss they made over me down there! I wouldn’t have minded settling there for good and all; and that’s what I should have done. Only the stage, you know, when once one’s got it in the blood … I acted for the best, as I thought, and left the kid there with the wet-nurse; I felt quite safe. Then, eight months later … Meanwhile I’d fallen ill, too,” she sighed after a moment’s pause. “The confinement had wrecked my health. I had to leave the Opera, say goodbye to everything. And there I was again-alone in the world!”

He scanned her face. She was not weeping; her eyes were wide open, staring up at the ceiling. But slowly, very slowly, tears were welling up beneath her eyelids. Abashed by her emotion, he dared not kiss her. He was thinking out what she had told him. Each day

he fancied he had found a stable vantage-point whence to survey her life in its entirety and judge it whole; but the very next day some reminiscence or avowal, even a casual hint, sufficed to open unsuspected vistas which once again he could not get in focus.

Suddenly she drew herself up, raising an arm to set her hair straight; but, as abruptly, stayed the gesture.

"Look! Oh, look!" she cried, pointing to the screen.

Involuntarily, across a mist of tears, she gazed wide-eyed at a girl on horseback flying from pursuit, with a furious pack of Redskins at her heels. The fearless maiden and her steed whisked up a rocky slope, posed for a second statue-like upon the summit, then scudded down a dizzy gradient. Intrepidly she plunged into a torrent, and thirty horsemen splashed in after her, vanishing in clouds of spray. Now she was on the further bank, spurring her horse, galloping ahead. Vain hope! The kidnappers rode hell-for-leather on her track, closed in around their quarry. Lassos whipped the air above her, snaked round her head. An iron bridge hove into sight, beneath it an express in full career. In a flash she slipped from the saddle, vaulted the parapet, leapt into the void.

The audience gasped.

Brief panic. Now they saw her standing on the roof of a car, borne past at headlong speed, her hair awry, with flying skirts and arms akimbo, while, from the bridge, the Redskins discharged thirty guns at her in vain.

"Were you watching?" Her voice thrilled with delight. "I love it!"

He drew her towards him again, this time onto his knees, and rocked her like a child. He wanted to console her, make her forget everything, everything but their love. But he said nothing of it and began toying with her necklace. Inset between the honey-golden beads were little balls of leaden-hued ambergris which, as he fingered them, grew warm and fragrant; so clinging was the perfume that sometimes, two days later, he would catch a sudden tang of it in the hollow of his hands. Unfastening her blouse, he pressed his cheek upon her breast; she did not try to stop him. Then:

"Come in!" she cried.

A young attendant appeared; she had opened the door of their box by mistake and quickly closed it, but not before casting an interested glance at the half-undressed girl in Antoine's arms. Antoine released Rachel in haste, but not in time—much to her amusement.

"How silly you are! Perhaps she wanted to … Anyway she looks nice… ."

The words and the way she said them were so astonishing that he tried to catch the look on her face, but she had buried her forehead on his shoulder and all he noticed was her laugh—an almost soundless, enigmatic chuckle that always made him ill at ease.

The element of mystery in Rachel that still was apt to baffle him always gave Antoine the impression of a yawning gulf between them. It roused in him a feeling of unrest, tinctured with curiosity, subtly obnoxious to his self-esteem. For hitherto it had been he who, as a man of science, by veiled allusions, sceptic smiles, set others in a quandary. Rachel had turned the tables on him; beside her Antoine felt atrociously small-boyish and (loath though he was to own to it) rather at sea where certain subjects were concerned. Once, to redress the balance, he had ventured to garnish his professional reminiscences with echoes from the students' mess and even invented for her benefit a far-fetched amorous adventure in which, so he alleged, he had played a leading part. But she had shut him up with a burst of affectionate laughter.

"Drop it, my dear! Whom do you take me for? Don't I love you just as you are?"

He had reddened with annoyance; and he had learned his lesson.

Neither had felt inclined to speak during the interval which was just ending. The film of Africa was announced and the lights went down. The band struck up a Negro melody. Rachel moved to a seat in front of the box.

"Let's hope they've made a good job of it."

Landscapes began to flicker across the screen. A stagnant river under enormous trees tethered to the soil by a network of lianas. A hippo's back, like the corpse of a drowned bull, bulged on the surface of the water. Little black monkeys, white-bearded, like ancient mariners, frolicked on the sand. Then came a village: an empty space of beaten soil fissured by the heat, and, in the background, rows of stockaded huts. Next, a compound where some young Peuhl girls, naked to the waist, the muscles of their hips working beneath the loin-cloths, were busily pounding grain in high wooden mortars, surrounded by pickaninnies sprawling in the sun. Then more women, carrying large baskets; then a group of spinners, squatting cross-legged on the ground; each grasped a distaff in her right hand, while the left twirled inside a wooden trough the bobbin, shaped like a peg-top, which took the yarn.

Leaning well forward, Rachel gazed intently at the screen, her elbow resting on her crossed knees, her chin cupped in her hand.

Antoine could hear the rapid intake of her breath. Sometimes, without turning, she spoke to him in a hushed whisper.

"Toine dear! Look! Just look!"

The film ended with a barbaric dance to the sound of tomtoms in a clearing ringed with palm-trees. Night was falling and a crowd of Negroes, their faces tense, their bodies squirming with delight, had formed a circle round a couple of their fellow-tribesmen. The dancers, two jet-black but extremely handsome males, were almost naked; their bodies shone with sweat. They flew at each other, collided, bounded back, and crashed together again, gnashing their teeth, or, now and again, circled in the love-chase, rubbing their bodies together, varying the rhythms of their frenzy as they portrayed the rage of battle or the spasms of sensual desire. Panting, capering with excitement, the dark crowd closed in round the frenzied couple; faster and faster they clapped their hands and faster drummed upon the tomtoms, goading the dancers on and on towards a climax of delirium. The picture-house band had stopped playing; a clapping of hands in the wings kept time with the gestures of the Negroes, restoring a fantastic semblance of life to the dark figures and infecting the audience with something of the fierce pleasure, strung to the pitch of pain, that convulsed the savage faces on the screen… .

The show was over, the audience filing out. Attendants were beginning to sheet the empty seats.

Silent and exhausted, Rachel could hardly bring herself to move. When Antoine, who was already on his feet, held up her evening-cloak she rose and pressed her lips to his. They were the last to go; neither of them spoke. As they left the cinema they found themselves caught in a crowd of people flocking out together from all the amusement places on the boulevards. The warm, soft darkness shimmered with twinkling lights and already some autumn leaves were slowly spinning down. Antoine took her arm, whispering in her ear: "Let's go back to your place now."

"Oh, not yet, please," she protested. "Let's go somewhere first. I'm thirsty." Then the posters outside the theatre caught her eye and she swerved aside to examine once more the photograph of the young Negro. "It's extraordinary," she remarked, "how he's like a boy who once came down the Casamance with us. A Wolof boy: Mamadou Dieng."

"Where shall we go?" he asked, concealing his disappointment.

"Oh, any old place! The Britannic? No, what about Packmell's? Let's walk there. That's it: an iced chartreuse at Packmell's, and then we'll go home." She nestled up to him with a sudden tenderness that seemed like an earnest of better things to come.

"It's upset me a bit, you know, thinking of poor little Mamadou this evening, just after seeing that film. You remember the photo I showed you, with Hirsch sitting in the stern of the jolly-boat? You said he looked like a Buddha in a sola topee. Well, the boy on whom he's leaning, a real blackamoor in a little white shift—do you remember?—that's Mamadou."

"And how do you know it wasn't he in the film?" he asked, to humour her.

After a moment's silence she shuddered slightly.

"Poor kid, I saw him eaten alive under my eyes, some days later. He was bathing in a stream. No, it was really Hirsch who … You see, Hirsch bet Mamadou he wouldn't swim a tributary of the river to get an egret that I'd just brought down—and how often I've wished I'd missed it! The boy said he'd have a try, and dived in. We watched him swimming across, when suddenly—! Oh, it was like a nightmare! It all happened in a flash, you know. We saw him suddenly standing up out of the water; he'd been nipped below the waist, you see. I shall never forget his scream. Hirsch always rose to the occasion at such moments. He knew at once that the boy was a goner, and would endure agonies. He brought his gun to his shoulder and— bang!—the child's head crumpled up like a calabash. The best way out, wasn't it? But I felt like being sick."

She paused and pressed herself to Antoine's shoulder.

"Next day I went to take a snapshot of the place. The water was calm, so calm, you'd never have dreamt …"

Her voice shook. There was a longer pause before she spoke again.

"With Hirsch, you see, one life more or less simply doesn't count. Still, he liked that boy of his. Well, he didn't turn a hair. That's how he was. Even after the accident, he stuck to his idea; he promised an alarm-clock to anyone who'd retrieve my egret. I tried to stop him, but he shut me up. He always insisted on being obeyed. Well, in the end I got it. One of the porters fetched it; he had better luck than the boy." She was smiling now. "I've got it still. I wore it last winter on a little brown velvet toque; a dinky little hat it was, too!"

Antoine made no comment.

"Oh, you old stay-at-home!" she burst out, and petulantly drew away from him. "A trip to Africa'd have been the making of you!"

Then, in swift contrition, she came back and took his arm again.

"Don't take any notice of me, Toine dear; a show like tonight's works me up till I'm positively ill. I'm sure I've got a touch of fever—haven't I? One stifles here in France. It's only over there one can really live. You can't imagine what it means—the white man's freedom among all those blacks. Not a soul on this side has the faintest notion how far it goes. No laws, nothing to tie you down! You needn't even bother what other people think of you. See what I mean? Can you even imagine what it's like? You have the right to be yourself everywhere and all the time. You're just as free amongst those black folk as you are at home with only your dog to watch you. And, what's more, they're really charming people to live among. You'd never believe how tactful, how quick to understand, they can be. Just fancy having only cheerful, smiling faces round you, and keen young eyes that can read your least desire. Why, I remember … Sure I'm not boring you, dear? I remember one day when we pitched camp out in the desert and Hirsch was chatting with a headman near the spring where the women used to draw water; it was getting dark—that's the time they always come—and we saw two darling little girls come up, carrying a huge oxhide waterskin between them. 'They my girls,' the Cadi explained to us. That was all. But the old fellow had guessed… . That night when I was with Hirsch in the *dar*, the mat slid up without a sound, and lo and behold our two little girls, smiling all over their faces!" She walked a few paces in silence before continuing. "As I said … your least desire. And … yes, I remember, another time—it's such a relief to have someone to tell about it! At Lomé, it was. At the pictures, too, as it happens; everybody there goes to the pictures in the evening. It's just a cafe terrace, very brightly lit, with evergreens in tubs all round it. Suddenly the lights go out and the show begins. You sip iced drinks while you watch it—see the idea? The Europeans, dressed up in their white ducks, sit in front, with the light reflected from the screen falling on their faces; behind them it's pitch-dark, no, blue-dark—you'd never believe how blue—and I've never seen the stars so bright anywhere else. That's where the natives sit and watch, youngsters and girls. You can hardly see their faces for shadows, but their eyes glow like the eyes of cats—such lovely eyes! Well, you needn't even make a sign. Your eyes just linger on one of the smooth, dark faces, meet his eyes for a second—and that's all. But it's enough. A few minutes later you get up and go, without a glance behind, to your hotel; all the doors are left open on purpose. I had a room on the second floor. I'd hardly had time to undress when I heard someone scratching at the shutter. I put out the light and opened the window. There he was! He'd slithered up the wall like a lizard. Without a word he let his one and only garment slide off his little body. I shall never forget it. His mouth was moist and cool so cool!"

"Good God!" Antoine could not help exclaiming to himself. "A nigger—and not even vetted beforehand to make sure!"

"They've such wonderful skins," Rachel went on. "Fine-grained like the rind of a fruit. None of you over here have an idea of what it's really like. It's smooth as satin, their skin; dry and sleek as if it had just been dusted with talcum powder, without a single blemish or trace of unevenness or moisture, but hot as fire under the surface; hot, like a feverish arm across a muslin sleeve—see what I mean?— or a bird's body underneath the feathers. And when you look at it under the glaring African sun and the light's splashing all over their shoulders, that gold-brown skin of theirs looks like shot silk, speckled with blue flashes—oh, I simply can't describe it!—like little specks of powdered steel, or a shower of broken moonbeams. Such eyes they have, too! Surely you've noticed how their glance hovers over you like a caress; it's the white of their eyes, you know, a trifle browned, with the pupils swimming about in it, never quite at rest. Then—I can hardly explain it—love-making in those parts isn't a bit like yours, over here. It's all done without words—like a sacrament, but the most natural thing in the world. There's not an atom of thought goes into it. Over here people are bound to keep it more or less dark when they're out for pleasures of that kind, but there—why, it's as normal as life itself, and just as sacred as life and love. Do you see what I mean, Toine dear? 'In Europe,' Hirsch always said, 'you have what you deserve. Happily there are other countries for people like ourselves, free-minded people.' He simply adores the black man." She started laughing. "Do you know how I first discovered that about him? Surely I've told you? No? It was at a restaurant, in Bordeaux. He was sitting opposite

me and we were talking. Suddenly I noticed him staring hard at something behind me; it only lasted a second, but there was a curious glitter in his eyes. … It was so striking that I swung round at once. I saw a little Negro, a lad of about fifteen, near a side-table, carrying a bowl of oranges." In a soft, brooding voice, she added: "It was that day, most likely, I too began to hanker after going over there."

They took some steps in silence.

"My ambition," she suddenly exclaimed, "my dream for when I'm old is to—to run a brothel. Don't look so shocked! There are brothels and brothels, and naturally I'd keep a high-class one. I'd loathe growing old amongst old people. I'd like to be sure of having young folk round me, fine young bodies; free, sensual bodies. Can't you understand that, dear?"

They were almost at Packmell's, and Antoine had not answered her. What, indeed, could he have found to say? Rachel was an uncharted land for him, where he encountered nothing but surprises. He felt so alien from her, rooted to the soil of France by his middle-class upbringing, by his work and his ambitions, by the career he had so carefully mapped out. He saw the bonds that held him and had not the faintest wish to break them; but for all that Rachel liked, that alien world of hers, he had the antipathy of a domesticated animal for the prowling denizens of the wild that are a menace to the home.

Nothing in the placid frontage of the carbaret, except the streaks of garish light that filtered past the edges of the crimson curtains, gave any inkling of the cheerful scene behind them. The revolving-door swung round with a groan, launching a gust of purer air into the atmosphere within, fetid with dust and heat and the stale fumes of alcohol.

The place was crowded and dancing was in progress.

Rachel headed for a vacant table near the cloak-room and did not wait to let her cloak drop from her shoulders before ordering a green chartreuse with crushed ice. When the drink appeared she propped her elbows on the table and sat before it motionless, with the twin straws between her lips.

"In the dumps?" Antoine inquired.

Her eyelids flickered and, drinking still, she threw him as gay a smile as she could muster up.

Near them a dark woman was flaunting shamelessly upon the tablecloth a biceps worthy of a boxer, which a Japanese, his childish face belied by an array of small but rusted teeth, squeezed with polite disdain.

"I'd like another drink, please; the same as before." Rachel pointed to her empty glass.

Antoine felt a light tap on his shoulder.

"I wondered for a moment if it was you," a cordial voice addressed him. "So you've shed your beard!"

Daniel stood before them. The lamplight fell harshly on the faultless oval of his face as he stood there, slim and willowy, twiddling an advertisement-fan between his ungloved hands; bending it into a circle, then letting it spring back, with a provocative smile upon his lips, he called to mind the stripling David, testing his sling.

While Antoine was introducing him to Rachel, Daniel's taunt came back to him. "I'd have acted just as you did—you humbug!" But now it seemed to him the taunt had lost its sting, and it was with a thrill of pleasure he observed the look the young man, after stooping to kiss Rachel's hand, cast on her face, lifted towards him, and on her arms and neck, gleaming snow-white against the blush-pink bodice.

Daniel took another look at Antoine, then smiled towards the girl, as though congratulating her on her handiwork.

"Yes, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's a vast improvement."

"Yes, I dare say it is, as long as one's alive!" Antoine affected the tone of a facetious medical student. "But if you'd seen as many 'stiffs' as I have …! After two days—!"

Rachel rapped on the table to make him stop. She often forgot that Antoine was a doctor. Turning to him, she scanned him for a moment, then murmured tenderly:

"My medicine-man!"

Could it be possible this face she knew so well was the same face as that which she had watched during the operation under the garish lamplight—a hero's face and terrible in beauty, superbly inaccessible? How well she knew it—better than ever, now she saw it unconcealed, with all its contours, its smallest details visible! The razor had exposed a slight hollow in the cheeks—a certain slackness of the tissues—giving them a milder air that somewhat redeemed the sternness of the jaw. She had learned by touch, as blind men learn their world, under the nightly pressure of her palms, the squareness of his jawbones, the squat curve of his chin, so oddly flattened on its under surface that she had exclaimed: "Why, your under-jaw's almost exactly like a snake's!" But now his beard had gone, what she found most perplexing in his face was the long, sinuous line of his mouth—so rigid was it, yet so plastic; its corners hardly ever lifted and seldom drooped—cut short abruptly on either side by a straight line, a trait of more than human will-power, such as is sometimes found on the faces of ancient statutes. "Is his will *really* so strong as that?" she asked herself. Bending forward, she scrutinized him rather mischievously from the corner of an eye, and a brief glint of gold flickered along her eyelashes.

Antoine suffered her scrutiny with the pleased smile of a man who knows himself beloved. Since shaving off his beard, he had come to take a rather different view of himself; he set less store by his hypnotic gaze, for he detected in himself new possibilities, new and eminently agreeable ones. Moreover, for some weeks past, he had felt a thoroughgoing change coming over him; so drastic was it that the events in his life which preceded his meeting with Rachel were falling away into obscurity—they had taken place before. Before what? Before his transformation. A vicious circle; but he let it go at that. Yes, his temperament had changed, had grown more supple; more mature and, at the same time, younger. He liked to tell himself that he had also gained in strength of mind, and he was not far wrong. True, less reflection lay behind his forcefulness; but its very spontaneity made it more telling, more authentic in its exercise. The change that had come over him had affected even his life's work; at first his love-affair had tended to divert it from its course, but, of a sudden, it had gathered strength, till his life brimmed over with it, like a river in spate.

"Don't take so much interest in my appearance," Antoine protested, waving Daniel into a chair. "We've just come from the movies. *In Darkest Africa*; do you know it?"

"Have you ever been outside Europe?" Rachel suddenly inquired.

The resonance of her voice took Daniel by surprise.

"No, never."

"Well," she said, drawing towards her the glass that had just arrived, and greedily plunging two fresh straws into the cold, green depths, "it's a film you should see. That view, for instance, of a string of porters on the trek at sunset. Don't you think so, Antoine? And the kids playing in the sand while the women are unloading the canoes."

"Certainly I'll go and see it," Daniel replied, his eyes intent on her. Then, after a short pause, he added: "Do you know Anita?"

She shook her head.

"She's a coloured girl from America, who is usually to be seen at the bar. Yes, there she is, you can see her now, just behind Marie-Josephe—the tall woman, you know, with all the pearls."

Drawing herself up, Rachel discerned, across the throng of dancers, a fawn-coloured face half hidden in the shadow of a massive hat.

"That's not a Negress!" Rachel made no attempt to hide her disappointment. "She's only a Creole."

Daniel smiled faintly.

"So sorry!" he murmured, then turned to Antoine. "Do you come here often?"

Antoine was about to answer yes, but Rachel's presence checked the impulse.

"Hardly ever."

Rachel's eyes were following Anita, who now was dancing with Marie-Josephe. The supple body of the American girl showed to advantage in a close-fitting white satin dress, lustrous as a bird's plumage and glittering at every movement of her long, lithe limbs, with gleams of pearly light.

"Will you be going to Maisons tomorrow?" Antoine asked.

"I've only just come from there," Daniel replied. He was about to speak of Jacques when his eyes fell on a Spanish-looking girl, with a saffron shawl draped round her, who seemed to be hunting for someone. "Excuse me," he murmured hastily and made off. Slipping a practised arm beneath the shawl, he danced the girl away, to the strains of a boston, towards the corner where the band was playing.

Anita had stopped dancing and Rachel watched her breasting the flood of dancers with a swan's easy grace, steering a course, as chance would have it, towards the table where she and Antoine sat. The Creole brushed against the young man's chair and, coming to the settle where Rachel was seated, took out of her bag an object which she kept hidden in the hollow of her hand, then, thinking herself unobserved—indifferent, perhaps, to being seen—placed her foot on the settle and, whisking up her skirt, punctured her thigh. Rachel caught a fleeting glimpse of chocolate skin showing between two waves of silken whiteness, and her eyelids twitched involuntarily. Letting her skirt drop back, Anita drew herself erect with a slow, languid movement that set the crystal, dangling from a pearl in her earlobe, sparkling with sudden fires. Then she went back to her friend.

Rachel rested her elbows on the table, her eyes half closed, and slowly drew into her mouth the iced liqueur. The violins' caress, the passionate insistence of their throbbing strings, worked on her mood of sensuous languor till it was almost unendurable.

Antoine looked at her.

"Lulu …!" he murmured.

Raising her eyes to his, she drew away the last faint tinge of green from the crushed ice in her glass. The look she gave him came as a surprise; a laughing, almost saucy look.

"You, I suppose, you've never … seen a black woman?"

"No," Antoine unblushingly confessed.

She made no comment. A cryptic smile flickered on her lips.

"Come along then!" she suddenly commanded.

Rising at once, she wrapped her coat of shining black about her as if it were a domino for some nocturnal masquerade. As she went out by the revolving-door with Antoine at her heels, he heard once more, behind her close-set lips, the husky little laugh that always so dismayed him.

# XII

IN THE days when Jerome was still living in Paris, his concierge in the Avenue de l'Observatoire had standing orders to keep his mail for him, and he called periodically to collect his letters. Then his visits had abruptly ceased. He had left no address and for two consecutive years a mass of correspondence had been accumulating. Now that the concierge had heard of M. de Fontanin's return to Maisons-Laffitte, he requested Daniel to deliver it in person to its rightful owner.

Buried in a pile of circulars, two letters came as a surprise to Jerome.

One of them, eight months old, announced that an ill-starred enterprise from which he had long ceased to expect returns had been wound up, and his share of the assets—six thousand francs and some odd hundreds—was lying to his credit. His face brightened. The remittance was a godsend; now at last he could shake off the vague discomfort which had been oppressing him ever since he had settled down at Maisons—a feeling due not only to his presence in a home where he now felt out of place but also to a lack of ready money, which piqued his pride.

(Five years previously his share of the family fortunes had passed out of his hands. Without applying for a divorce Mme. de Fontanin had sequestrated the modest inheritance left her by her father, the clergyman. This sum, though by no means intact at the time of their separation, had enabled her to live so far in some degree of comfort, and to keep up her flat without stinting her outlay on the children's education. Jerome had not yet squandered all the money left him by his parents and still kept up his business activities; even when, dancing attendance on Noémie, he had settled down in Holland or in Belgium, he had dabbled in the stock-markets, speculated, and promoted new inventions. For all his lack of ballast, he was quick to see an opening, and this ability, coupled with his fondness for taking risks, enabled him, now and again, to back a winning venture. Fat years and lean, he had lived them through, oftener than not upon a lavish scale; sometimes indeed, for conscience' sake, he had even contrived to remit a thousand francs or so to his wife's account, by way of contribution to the children's maintenance. But, during the last few months of his sojourn abroad, things had taken a turn for the worse and, for the moment, he had no means of drawing on his capital. He could see no way of refunding the money Thérèse had brought to Amsterdam and, worse still, he was now obliged to live at his wife's expense. This was bitter enough; but bitterer still was the thought that she might misinterpret his motives, might imagine it was lack of money that had brought the wanderer home.)

Thanks to this windfall, then, Jerome felt his dignity slightly restored. He would be able now to discharge his obligations.

So eager was he to impart the news to his wife that he began to move towards the door, opening as he went the other envelope, inscribed in an illiterate hand, which conveyed nothing to him. Suddenly he stopped, aghast.

> Dear Sir,
>
> I take up my pen to tell you something has happened to me which I am not put out about at all not in the least in fact I am quite happy about it as I have been so awfull lonely, but I have been dismissed from my place because of it and I dont know what to do, but I am sure you will not go on leaving me without any money at such a time because this is it I cant get another place people can see it to much, and I have only 30 francs fifty and nothing more to keep the baby after and I do so want to feed it myself as everybody ought to.
>
> I dont blame you one bit only I hope that when you get this you will do the right thing by me, you must bring me the needfull tomorrow or the day after or thursday at the latest as I dont know what will become of me if you dont.
>
> With all my true love
> V. Le Gad.

At first he could make nothing of it. "Le Gad—who's that?" Then suddenly he remembered. "Victorine! Why, it's Cricri!"

Retracing his steps, he sat down, rolling the sheet of note-paper between his fingers. "Tomorrow or the day after." He could just decipher the date on the postmark; the letter had been awaiting him for two whole years! Poor Cricri! What had become of her? What meaning had she read into his silence? And—the child? No genuine emotion touched him as he asked himself these questions; the commiserating air that unawares he had put on was a tribute to convention. Yet, all the while, a young, shy, tremulous body, two ingenuous eyes, a girlish mouth, were taking shape in his memory and stirring his senses more and more definitely.

Cricri? Where had he come across her? Ah, yes, at Noémie's place; Noémie had brought the girl back with her from Brittany. And after that? His memories of the suburban hotel where he had kept her hidden for a fortnight were rather blurred. Why had he left her then? Much clearer was the picture of another meeting two years after, during one of Noémie's escapades. Every detail of the servant's attic bedroom which he used to toil up to at nightfall came back to him clearly, and then the furnished rooms somewhere in the Rue de Richepanse where he had set her up later, during that second lease of passion which had lasted two or three months—or was it longer? He read the letter again, noted the date. A familiar warmth flooded his brain and clouded his eyes. Rising, he drank a glass of water, slipped Cricri's note into his pocket, and, with the business letter in his hand, went out to find his wife.

An hour later he was stepping into the Paris train.

It was striking ten o'clock when, in a delightful state of excitement, he left the Saint-Lazare station under a genial September sun. He drove to his bank and, simmering with impatience, waited at the counter; only when he had signed the receipt, had slipped the notes into his pocket-book and flung himself triumphantly into the waiting taxi—only then he felt that the shadow which had darkened his life for all these recent weeks had lifted; he had risen from the dead!

The arduous quest on which he now embarked took him all over Paris, from one concierge to another; indeed it promised to be fruitless till at about two in the afternoon—he had forgone luncheon—it led him to the home of a certain Mme. Barbin, *alias* Mme.

Juju. The mistress of the house was out, but the maid, who was youthful and loquacious, informed him that she knew the young lady, Mile. Le Gad—"Rinette, they all call her"—quite well.

"Only," she went on, "she never goes to her room at the hotel except Wednesdays; that's her day off."

Jerome blushed; but with a flash of understanding.

"Yes, of course." His smile conveyed that he was in the know. "But, you see, it's her other address I'm after."

By this time they were on the best of terms. "A nice little thing," Jerome suddenly said to himself. But he was quite decided to keep his mind exclusively on Cricri.

"It's in the Rue de Stockholm," the maid at last informed him with a smile.

Jerome had the taxi take him there, alighted, and was not long in finding the house described by the maid. An insidious melancholy which he would not avow—though for some time he had been trying to shake it off—was ousting his high spirits of the early hours.

The swift transition from the sunlit streets to the meretricious twilight of the establishment he now entered made him feel uneasier than ever. He was shown into the "Japanese" room, where the sole touch of local colour was a cheap Japanese fan pinned to the wall above the bed. He waited, hat in hand, affecting an unembarrassed air; but, wherever he turned his eyes, a mocking mirror presented him with his reflected self, till he could endure it no longer and seated himself at the extreme end of the sofa.

At last the door was flung open; a young prostitute, draped in a mauve tunic, bustled in and as abruptly halted, facing him.

"Oh!" she gasped; he supposed she had entered the room by mistake. But then, as she recoiled towards the door which she had closed instinctively on entering, she stammered out one word:

"You!"

Even now he was far from sure that it was she.

"Is it you, Cricri?"

Keeping her eyes fixed on Jerome, almost as if she half expected him to whip out a revolver from his pocket, Rinette reached towards the bed, pulled off the bedspread, and wrapped herself up in it.

"What's happened?" she asked. "Did someone send you?"

Vainly he tried to discover the childish Cricri he had known, behind the painted features of this showy harlot, with her bobbed hair and rather puffy cheeks. Even her country accent, her clear, young voice, had left her.

"What do you want of me?" she asked.

"I've come to see you, Cricri."

For a moment she misconstrued the gentleness in his voice; he puzzled her. Then, averting her eyes, she decided, or so it seemed, to let things take their course.

"Please yourself," she said.

She went to the sofa and sat down, keeping the bedspread wrapped round her body, but letting it fall a little from her neck and arms.

"Who told you to come here?" she repeated with lowered eyes.

The question nonplussed him. Standing awkwardly before her, he began explaining that he had come back to France after a long stay abroad and had only just received her letter.

"What letter?" she asked, raising her eyes.

Once again he saw the grey-green lustre of her pupils; they, anyhow, looked innocent as ever. He handed her the envelope; she stared at it bemusedly.

"Well, upon my word!" she exclaimed, casting a venomous look at him. Holding the letter she nodded emphatically several times. "Of all the low-down tricks! To think you didn't even bother to answer it!"

"But, I tell you, Cricri, I only opened it this morning."

"That's neither here nor there; you might at least have answered me," she persisted with an obstinate toss of her head.

"I did better than that; I came here myself right away," he patiently explained. Then, unable to control himself, he asked: "And—the child?"

Her lips tightened, she gulped down her saliva and tried to speak, but the words would not come. Her eyes filled with tears.

At last she managed to speak.

"Dead. It was born too soon."

Jerome sighed—but it sounded like a sigh of relief. Under Rinette's vindictive stare, he felt cowed, humiliated, bereft of speech.

"To think it's all your fault!" she continued in a voice that was less hostile than her eyes. "I wasn't one of them fast ones, and very well you knew it. Twice I believed what you had promised me, twice over I gave up everything to live with you. Oh, how I cried when you left me again, for the second time!" She held him with a downward look, her shoulders hunched and mouth a little twisted; her eyes were shining greener than ever through her tears. He felt at once aggrieved and sick at heart; uncertain what line to take, he forced his lips into a smile… . How like Daniel he was with that crooked smile of his!

She dried her eyes and, unexpectedly, addressed him in a steady voice.

"And how is the mistress?"

Jerome realized at once that she meant Noémie. On his way he had decided not to allude to Mme. Petit-Dutreuil's death, lest the news should prey on Cricri's feelings, calling up sentiments or scruples which might thwart the plans he had in mind. So, without further thought, he kept to the story he had decided on.

"She's on the stage, abroad." It cost him an effort to go on. "She's quite well, I believe."

"On the stage!" Rinette echoed the words respectfully.

Now they were silent. She turned towards him with an expectant air. Smiling, she let the drapery fall a little lower on her neck and shoulders.

"But all that—it isn't only for that you've come to see me," she said.

At the least sign from him, Jerome was well aware, Cricri would be in his arms. But nothing, alas, survived of all the wild desire which had sped him all the day, like a hound in cry, hotfoot on her trail, tracking his quarry to her lair from end to end of Paris.

"That," he replied, "is the only reason why I've come."

Rinette looked surprised, almost offended.

"Well, let me tell you, here we're not supposed to see … ordinary visitors."

Jerome made haste to change the subject.

"Why have you cut your hair?"

"They prefer it short."

He concealed his discomfiture with a smile, and could think of nothing else to say. And yet he could not make up his mind to leave. A secret discontent gnawed at his heart, compelling him to stay. It was as if something important remained to do. But what? … Poor Cricri! Well, the damage had been done; there was no way of mending it… . No way at all?

Somewhat abashed by his silence, she stole a furtive glance at Jerome, a look more curious than hostile. Why had he come back? Could he be still just a little in love with her? The fancy stirred her with faint longings and suddenly a wild idea flashed through her mind: couldn't she have another child by him? All her frustrated hopes flamed up again. Jerome's son, Daniel's little brother, a child of her own, and for her only! She all but cast herself at Jerome's feet and clasped his knees, murmuring with a look of fond entreaty: "I want to have a child by you!" No! That would shatter, for a mere caprice, all the future which, inch by hard-won inch, she was now rebuilding. A brief emotion thrilled her body, and for a moment her eyes brooded on an elusive dream; but then she murmured through tight-set lips: "No, it can't be done."

"How's Daniel?" she suddenly inquired.

"Who? My son?" Then in a constrained voice he added: "Do you know him?"

Rinette, though why she hardly knew, had hoped that Daniel had something to do with Jerome's return. Now she was sorry that his name had crossed her lips, and decided to say nothing more about him; neither father nor son must ever guess her secret, the strange dilemma of her love;

She turned the question.

"Do I know him? Why, everyone in Paris knows him! Yes, I've met him."

Jerome's anxiety deepened, but he dared not put the question: "Was it here?"

"Where did you meet him?" he asked.

"Oh, all over the place. In cabarets."

"Yes," he observed, "I thought as much. I've told him more than once what I think of the life he's leading."

"Oh, that was ages ago," she made haste to add. "I don't know if he still goes to such places. Perhaps he's turned over a new leaf—like me!"

He gazed at her in silence, sincerely grieving over the depravity of the younger generation, the collapse of moral codes—and, most of all, over this brothel, and this fellow-creature abandoned to the powers of evil.

Such is life, he mused, but why must it be so? And suddenly he felt crestfallen, conscience-stricken.

Rinette, lost once again in roseate visions of the future, the goal towards which henceforth all her efforts would be directed, gave utterance to her daydream, clicking her garter against her thigh.

"Yes, I've straightened things out at last—that's why I've not got my knife into you any more. If I stick to my job and don't play the fool, in another three years it's goodbye to Paris for me! That godforsaken old Paris of yours!"

"Why in three years?"

"Why, it's simple as shelling peas. I've been here just under a month now and I'm making fifty or sixty francs clear, day in, day out. Four hundred a week. That means, in three years—sooner, with any luck—I'll have scraped together thirty thousand francs. When that day comes you'll hear no more of Cricri, Rinette, and the bunch of 'em; Miss Victorine will hop into the Lannion train with all her bags and baggage, and a wad of banknotes in her pocket. Goodbye to the whole lot of you!"

She chuckled.

"No," Jerome reassured himself with desperate insistence, "surely I'm not so depraved as my acts would make me. No, the problem's not so simple as all that; I'm better than the life I lead. Yet, only for me, this girl … Only for me!" And from the depths of memory the words came back to him once more: "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

"Are your parents alive?" he asked.

A notion, imprecise as yet, though even now he was at pains to keep it under, was slowly taking form within his mind.

"My old dad, he died last year, on Saint Yves' day." She paused, doubtful if she should cross herself or not; she decided against it. "I've only Auntie left. She has a little house on the market-square, just behind the church. You don't know Perros-Guirec, do you? As it so happens, I'm the old dame's only heir. 'Tisn't that she's so mighty well-to-do, but the house is hers, that's something. She lives on a pension, a thousand francs a year. She was in service with titled folk for years and years. She lets out the chairs in church, too, and that brings in a bit. Well"—she paused a moment, then her face brightened—"with thirty thousand francs' capital Mme. Juju swears that I can have the same income, or as near as may be. I'll find something to do to make up the difference, sure enough. And then we'll keep house together. We always hit it off, her and I… . And down there," she added, watching her toes twisting and turning in the tiny satin slippers, "down there nobody knows a mortal thing about me; it'll all be done with, for good and all."

Jerome had risen. His plan was taking definite shape, obsessing his mind. For a moment or two he paced to and fro. An act of generosity … to make amends!

He halted in front of Rinette.

"You're really fond of your home—of Brittany, aren't you, Victorine?"

So taken aback was she by his punctilious "Victorine" that she could not reply at once.

Then, "I should say so!" she rejoined.

"Well, you're going back there. Yes, you are. Now listen!"

Again he fell to his restless pacing to and fro, eager to have his way, like a spoilt child. "It's now or never," he reflected. "Otherwise I won't be answerable for the consequences."

"Listen!" He jerked out the words. "You're going back there." Then, looking her boldly in the eyes, he added peremptorily: "This very night."

She laughed.

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Tonight?"

"Yes."

"To Perros?"

"To Perros."

Now she had ceased to laugh; with malevolent eyes and lowered brows she looked him up and down. What business had he to play the fool with her? Was it a subject to make jokes about?

"If you had a thousand francs a year like your aunt …" he began.

His smile convinced her that he meant her well. But what could he be after with his "thousand francs a year"? She worked it out composedly: twelve into a thousand.

The smile had left his lips.

"Is there a notary in your village? What's his name?"

"A notary? Who do you mean? M. Benic?"

Jerome puffed his chest out.

"Well, Cricri, I give you my word of honour that every year, on the first of September, M. Benic will hand you a thousand francs on my behalf. Here's the money for this year." He pulled out his pocket-book. "And here's another thousand to pay your expenses settling in." He held out the money.

She opened her eyes wide and bit her lip without replying. There the money lay, within her reach; she had only to stretch out her hand. So simple-minded was she still, in spite of all, that the proposal left her wonder-struck, but not incredulous. Patiently Jerome held out the notes and at last she took them; after folding and refolding them as small as possible she slipped them inside her stocking and stared at Jerome, tongue-tied. It never entered her head that she might kiss him; she had forgotten not only what she now was but what they had been to each other. He was once more M. Jerome, Mme. Petit-Dutreuil's friend, and she was as shy of him now as the first time she had set eyes on him.

"But," he added, "it's on one condition—that you leave this place at once."

She was not prepared for that.

"What? At once? This afternoon? No, I can't manage that, sir; really, it's impossible."

But rather than retard the issue of his good intentions even for a day, he would have preferred to drop them altogether.

"This afternoon without fail, my dear, and, what's more, I'll see you off."

Now there was no mistaking his determination, she flew into a temper. At once? What nonsense! For one thing, this was just the time she started work. Then, what about her things at the hotel? And the girl friend who shared the room with her? And Mme. Juju? And all her washing at the laundry? And anyhow the people here wouldn't hear of her going off like that. She fussed and fluttered like a netted bird.

"I'll go and fetch Mme. Rose!" she exclaimed at last, with tears in her eyes, when all her protests proved of no avail. "Then you'll see it simply can't be done. And, what's more, I don't want to do it!"

"Fetch her at once!"

Jerome foresaw a heated argument and was prepared to take a firm line with the lady. Mme. Rose's amiable smile came as a surprise.

"Of course she can. Why not?" she replied, for she had scented a police trap from the start. "All our young ladies are quite free; they can leave when they like." Turning to Rinette, she addressed her in a peremptory tone, rubbing her plump hands together. "Run along, my dear, and get dressed. Can't you see the gentleman's waiting?"

Rinette, clasping her hands, stared at her "madame" and at Jerome, turn by turn, in blank bewilderment. Big tears were sluicing down her make-up. Her mind was in a ferment of conflicting emotions, of mingled helplessness and rage and consternation. At that moment she hated Jerome. Moreover, she was reluctant to leave the room before conveying to him that he must not breathe a word about the money hidden in her stocking. Mme. Rose ended by flying into a towering passion and, grasping Rinette's arm, she ejected her forcibly. "Will you do as you're told, you!" she shouted at the girl, then hissed under her breath: "And never show your dirty, spying face here again!"

Half an hour later a taxi set Jerome and Rinette down at the hotel where the latter had a room. Rinette had ceased crying and, as she had no personal initiative to take, was coming to accept, though still reluctantly, the over-hastiness of the proceedings. But now and then a protest rose to her lips, like a refrain.

"In three years, I don't say no. But not now, please, not at once!"

Jerome made no answer, but patted her hand. "Today," he was repeating under his breath. "This very evening, without fail!" Just now he felt that he had strength enough to break down all resistance, but already he could see, only too clearly, the limit of his power; no time must be lost.

He had the hotel bill brought him, with a time-table. The train left at 7:15 p.m.

Rinette asked him to help her drag from underneath a wardrobe a battered wooden trunk containing a bundle of garments.

"My uniform when I was in service," she explained.

A memory of Noémie's dresses which Nicole had handed over to the pension-keeper at Amsterdam flashed across Jerome's mind. He sat down, drew Rinette onto his knee, and calmly, yet with real fervour throbbing in the cadence of each phrase, exhorted her to leave her finery behind, cast off the harlot's stock-in-trade, and begged her to go back, for good and all, to the simple ways, the purity of her former life.

She listened to him earnestly. His words were like an echo of some long-forgotten voice within herself. "And then," she could not help reflecting, "imagine me wearing those things at home! At high mass, for instance! What would they think of me?" She could never have brought herself to throw away, even to give away, the lace-trimmed underlinen and showy dresses on which so much of her savings had been spent. But she owed the girl with whom she shared the room two hundred francs and, now she was leaving Paris,

the debt loomed large in her mind. Why not settle it by leaving the clothes to her friend, and keep intact the round sum Jerome had provided? An excellent way out!

At the idea of putting on once more her shabby black serge dress she clapped her hands with glee, as if she were preparing for a fancy ball. She slipped off Jerome's knee with a burst of hysterical laughter that racked her body like a fit of sobbing.

Jerome had averted his eyes so as not to embarrass her while she dressed. He walked to the window and stared, in a brown study, at the courtyard wall in front. Surely, he mused, I'm worth more than people think! To his mind, this act of merit redeemed the error of the past, responsibility for which, however, he had never frankly taken on himself.

One thing more was needed to set his mind at rest. Without turning his head, he addressed the girl impulsively:

"Tell me that you're not angry with me any more."

"Not a bit!"

"No, but say the words. Say: 'I forgive you.' " Her courage failed her and, still gazing out of the window, he implored: "Be generous. Say just those three words!"

She obeyed him.

"Of course … of course, I forgive you, sir."

"Thank you."

Tears came to his eyes. He was an exile returning to his place in the scheme of things, regaining, after years of deprivation, a tranquil heart! At a window of the lower story a canary was in full song. "There is a soul of goodness in me," Jerome reflected. "People judge me over-harshly; they don't understand. As a man I'm better than the way I live." His heart overflowed with compassion, indiscriminate benevolence.

"Poor Cricri!" he murmured.

When he turned he saw Rinette fastening the last buttons of her black woollen bodice. She had drawn her hair back and, after a wash, her cheeks had regained their bloom; once more she looked the timid, rather mulish little servant-girl whom Noémie had brought back with her six years earlier from Brittany.

Unable to contain his feelings, Jerome went up to her and slipped his arm round her waist. "I'm good at heart," he kept on repeating to himself like a refrain. "Far better than anyone supposes." Instinctively his fingers unhooked her skirt while his lips rested on the girl's forehead in a paternal kiss.

Rinette shrank away—almost she seemed the shy, reluctant little girl of former days. He pressed her closely to him.

"Ah," she sighed, "so you still use the same scent—you know what I mean, the one that smells like lemonade." Smiling now, she lifted a responsive mouth to his, closing her eyes.

Was it not, indeed, the only token of gratitude that she could offer? And for Jerome, too, was it not the one gesture adequate in his present mood of mystic fervour to express in its entirety the devout compassion abounding in his heart?

When they reached the Montparnasse station her train was in. Now, for the first time, when she saw the car labelled "Lannion," Rinette woke to a sense of realities. No, there was no catch in it; the dream that she had cherished for so many years was coming true at last. Why then, she wondered, should she feel so sad?

Jerome found a seat for her and they paced up and down the platform in front of her car, in silence. Rinette was thinking of something, of someone… . But she found no words to break the silence. Something, it seemed, was preying on Jerome's mind as well, for several times he turned to her, as if about to speak, then looked away. At last, shunning her eyes, he blurted it out:

"I didn't tell you the truth, Cricri. Mme. Petit-Dutreuil is dead."

She asked for no details, but began to cry, and in her silent grief Jerome took heart of grace, thinking with flattering unction: "What kindness there is in all of us!"

No more words passed between them till the train was due to leave. Had she dared to do so, Rinette would have snatched at any pretext to hand back the money and return to Mme. Rose, begging to be taken back. The delay was getting on Jerome's nerves as well; the thought that he had achieved the rescue of this girl had lost its zest.

Only when the train was pulling out did Rinette pluck up her courage.

"Will you be so kind, sir, as to give my respects to M. Daniel?"

But the noise of the train drowned her voice. She saw he had not heard her; her lips began to quiver, her fingers tightened upon her breast. Jerome, all smiles, delighted to see her go, waved her goodbye with a courteous sweep of his hat.

A new thought had waylaid him and set him tingling with impatience; he would take the first train back to Maisons-Laffitte and, throwing himself at his wife's feet, confess everything—well, nearly everything.

"And then," he murmured to himself as he lit a cigarette and moved away from the station with brisk steps, "about the yearly allowance—I'd better explain matters to Thérèse; she's got a head on her shoulders and will see it's properly attended to."

# XIII

ANTOINE had formed the habit of calling several times a week at Rachel's place to take her out to dinner.

One evening as Rachel was on her way towards the mirror, preparatory to going out, and taking her powder-box out of her bag, she let a scrap of folded paper drop to the floor. Antoine picked it up and held it out to her.

"Eh? Oh, thanks!"

He thought he had detected an uneasy tremor in Rachel's voice; she read his thought at once.

"Well?" she said, trying to pass it off with a joke. "What's all the fuss about? It's only a time-table."

He said nothing and she replaced the paper in her bag. A moment later he blurted out the question:

"Are you going away?"

And now the flutter of her lashes, her twisted smile, were not to be mistaken.

"Well, Rachel …?"

Her smile had gone; a spasm of anguish gripped him. No, he thought; no, I mustn't let her. … I couldn't do without her, even for a day or two!

He went up to her and touched her arm; sobbing, she sank onto his breast.

"But what … what ever …?" he stammered.

She replied at once in brief, staccato sentences.

"No, it's nothing, nothing at all. Just my nerves. I'll tell you; then you'll see it's nothing much really. It's on account of baby's grave; at Gué-la-Rozière, you know. I haven't been to visit it for ages and ages; I really shall have to go there soon. You understand, don't you? Imagine my frightening you like that! I'm sorry. So you'd be dreadfully cut up—would you?—if … if one day——"

"Don't go on!" he begged in a low voice. Now for the first time he realized the place that Rachel had come to occupy in his life, and it appalled him. "How long will you be away?" he faltered.

Loosening her embrace, she ran off, with a forced laugh, to the washstand, to sponge her eyes.

"Isn't it silly, starting crying like that!" she exclaimed. "Do you know, the news came one evening—exactly like tonight—when I was just going out to dinner. I was at my place with some friends—people you don't know. There was a ring at the bell; a wire. 'Baby dangerously ill. Come.' I knew what it meant. I rushed off to the station just as I was, in a light tulle hat and evening shoes, and caught the first train out. What a journey that was! I was all alone and almost off my head. It's a wonder I wasn't quite crazy by the time I got there." She turned towards Antoine. "Wait just a bit longer! I'm letting them dry off; that's the best way." Her face lit up suddenly. "Antoine, do you want to do something very, very nice? Then you'll come along there with me. It would only take two days, you know —Saturday and Sunday. We could stay the night at Rouen or Caudebec and go on next day to the Gué-la-Rozière cemetery. Wouldn't it be great—to go off like that together, all on our own! Don't you think so?"

They left on the last Saturday in September. The afternoon was fine, the train almost empty, and they had the car to themselves. Antoine was delighted with his two days' holiday in Rachel's company ; a weight seemed lifted from . his shoulders and he looked younger. Like a schoolboy, he seemed unable to keep still, he laughed at everything and twitted Rachel about her luggage deployed along the rack. The better to feast his eyes upon her face, he refused to sit beside her.

"That'll do!" she protested when he got up again, this time to lower the blind. "I'm not going to melt."

"Perhaps not. But, when the sun's on your face, I'm positively blinded." And, indeed, when the light fell full on her cheeks and set her hair ablaze, his eyes grew dazzled if he looked long at her. "This is the first time we've travelled together," he presently remarked. "Has that struck you?"

She could not bring herself to smile. Her mouth was a little drawn, tense with resolve and contained emotion. He bent towards her.

"What's the matter?"

"It's nothing. Only the journey."

He was silent, aware that selfishly he had forgotten the object of their pilgrimage. But then she explained what she meant.

"Travelling always sets my nerves on edge. The landscape flying past. And always at a journey's end … the unknown!" Her eyes dwelt for a moment on the transient horizon. "And I've travelled in so many of them, trains and boats." Her look grew sombre.

Antoine slipped across to her side and, stretching himself full length on the seat, laid his head on her lap.

" 'Thy navel is like a round goblet … set about with lilies,' " he murmured. Then, after a moment's silence, realizing that Rachel's thoughts were far away, he asked her: "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing." She tried to speak lightly. "About your head-masterish tie, perhaps!" She slipped a finger under the silk. "To think that even when you travel you can't manage to knot it a trifle looser, let it out a bit!" She stretched herself and smiled. "A stroke of luck—isn't it?— having the car to ourselves. Now it's up to you to talk. Tell me about things that have happened to you."

He laughed.

"That's more in your line—things that happen! I've only my 'cases,' examinations, and so forth. How on earth could I have anything to yarn about? I've always lived like a mole, underground; it's you who've pulled me up to the surface and taught me to look at the world."

Never before had he confessed as much to her. Bending above the head she loved so well, pillowed on her knees, she took it between her hands, gazing into his eyes.

"You mean that? You really mean it?"

"Next year, you know," he went on, without changing his position, "we won't stay in Paris all the summer."

"No?"

"I haven't taken any leave this year; I'll fix things up to get a fortnight off at least."

"Yes."

"Three weeks, perhaps."

"Yes."

"We'll go abroad together, somewhere or other. Like the idea?"

"Yes."

"To the mountains, if you like. The Vosges, or Switzerland. Or we might go further afield."

There was a faraway look on Rachel's face.

"What are you thinking about now?" he asked.

"About what you're saying. Switzerland—rather!"

"Or the Italian lakes, perhaps."

"No."

Lying on his back, lulled by the rhythms of the swaying train, he drowsily agreed.

"All right then, we'll go somewhere else." After a moment's silence he added lazily: "What have you got against the Italian lakes?"

With the tips of her fingers she stroked Antoine's forehead, his eyelids, and his temples, slightly sunken like his cheeks, and did not answer. His eyes were closed, but the question he had put still simmered in his brain.

"Why won't you tell me what you have against the Italian lakes?"

She made a slight movement of impatience.

"Because, if you must know, that's where my brother died. My brother Aaron. At Pallanza."

He regretted his insistence, but did not drop the subject.

"Had he settled in Italy, then?"

"Oh, no, he was travelling. On his honeymoon." Her eyebrows frowned; then, after a moment, as if she had read Antoine's thought, she murmured: "No, there's no denying it, I've had my share of queer experiences in my time!"

"You don't hit it off with your sister-in-law, I suppose?" he suggested. "Anyhow you never speak of her."

The train was stopping; getting up, she looked out of the window. But she had heard Antoine's question, for she turned round towards him.

"Eh? What sister-in-law? Clara?"

"The one who married your brother; he died, you said, on his honeymoon."

"She died at the same time. Didn't I tell you about it? No?" She was still looking out of the window. "They were drowned in the lake. Nobody ever knew how it happened." She hesitated. "Nobody, except, perhaps … Hirsch."

"Hirsch!" he exclaimed, propping himself on his elbow. "Hirsch was with them, was he? Then—weren't you there, too?"

"Please don't let's talk about it today," she begged, returning to her seat. "Hand me my bag, please. Feeling hungry?" She unwrapped a bar of chocolate and, holding one end between her teeth, proffered the other end to Antoine, who gaily joined in the game.

"It tastes better that way," she observed with a greedy flicker of her eyelashes. Then a sudden, almost startling change came over her voice. "Clara was Hirsch's daughter. Got it straight, now? I came to know Hirsch through his daughter. Haven't I told you about it?"

He shook his head, but refrained from putting further questions; he was trying to make these latest details tally with what he had already gleaned from her. Anyhow it was not long before Rachel launched forth again—as she never failed to do when he ceased questioning her.

"You've never seen Clara's photo, have you? I'll hunt it up for you. She was a great pal of mine; I got to know her in the beginners' class. But she only stayed a year at the Opera; didn't have the stamina for it. And I suppose Hirsch preferred keeping her at home; that's more than likely, in fact. She and I were thick as thieves, and I used to go to see her every Sunday at the Neuilly riding-school. That's how I started learning riding, along with her. We got intc the way of going out for rides together, the three of us, and kept it up afterwards."

"Whom do you mean by 'the three of us'?"

"Why, Clara, Hirsch, and I, of course. From Easter on I used to join them at six o'clock sharp, three mornings a week. I had to be back at eight sharp at the Opera. We had the Bois de Boulogne to ourselves at that hour—and it was heavenly!" She paused a moment, and he gazed up at her, propping his elbows on the seat, and stayed thus without moving. Rachel harked back to her memories of the past. "A queer girl and no mistake! Full of grit and good-hearted as you make 'em. Lots of charm—with a spice of the gutter in it, and now and then you'd catch that terrifying expression of her father's on her face. Yes, Clara was the best friend I had in those days. Aaron had been keen on her for years; that was all he worked for, really —to marry her some day. But she wouldn't consent; no more would Hirsch, needless to say. Then one day she made up her mind all of a sudden; at the time I couldn't think why she did it. Why, even when the engagement was announced, I had no idea what was at the back of her mind. When I knew—it was too late to say anything." She paused again. "Then, three weeks after their marriage, Hirsch wired to me to come to Pallanza. I didn't know that he had gone off to join them, and the moment I heard he was there I knew something dreadful had happened… . Anyhow, there's no secret about it; everyone could see the bruises round Clara's neck. He must have strangled her."

" 'He'? Whom do you mean?"

"Aaron. Her husband. He had engaged a boat that evening for a trip on the lake—all by himself. Hirsch didn't try to stop him, it suited his book too well. He knew what he was about, I suppose, and guessed that Aaron meant to kill himself. Only Clara had an inkling of it, too; she picked a moment when Hirsch wasn't watching her and sprang into the boat, just as Aaron was starting to row away. Anyhow that's how I've pieced it together, bit by bit, for Hirsch …" She shuddered, then continued: "You never know what Hirsch has in his head."

Antoine broke the silence that ensued.

"But why should he have killed himself?" - "Aaron was always talking about suicide. He had it on the brain, even as a child. That's just why I didn't dare say anything to him, and let the marriage take place. Oh," she exclaimed in a tone of deep distress, "how I've reproached myself for it, since! Perhaps if I'd spoken out in time—" She gazed at Antoine, as though it lay with him to justify her to her conscience. "I'd found out their secret, you see. But was that a reason for letting Aaron know about it? What could I do? He had told me several times that he'd kill himself if Clara didn't marry him. And it's sure he'd have done it, if I'd told him what I had discovered—quite by accident, too. Don't you think so?"

Antoine could not answer; he repeated her words.

"By accident?"

"Yes, quite by accident. I'd gone to join Clara and Hirsch for a morning ride. I went straight upstairs to Clara's room; when I was near it I heard a scuffle going on and started to run. The door was ajar. Clara had no blouse on, her arms were bare and her riding skirt hampered her movements; then, just as I flung the door wide open, I saw her snatch up her riding-whip from a chair and slash him across the face with it as hard as she could. Hirsch felt it all right!"

"What? Her own father …?"

"Yes, my dear. That was a scene if you like—I often think of it!" She chuckled with vindictive glee. "The sight he was that morning, I shan't forget it in a hurry! His face went yellow, while the weal grew darker and darker. He was pretty free with his fists, himself, and, when he was at it, he hit hard. But that time it was his turn to get a cut across the face, for a change!"

"But … I don't follow."

"Well, I never knew exactly what had happened that morning. It struck me at once that, now she was engaged, Clara must have told him to … well, to leave her alone. Various details I'd already noticed, things that had puzzled me at the time, came back to me. In a flash I *understood*… . Hirsch marched out of the room with a high and mighty air, without saying a word to me. He seemed quite confident that I'd hold my tongue, and, as you know, he wasn't far wrong there. I ferreted the whole story out of Clara. But she swore to me—I'm sure she meant it, too—all that was over and done with, and she was marrying just to get away from it. To get away from Hirsch? Or did she mean from her own infatuation? That's what I should have asked myself that morning. I ought to have guessed it wasn't done with, not by any means, if only from the way she talked of Hirsch." After a pause, she went on in a brooding voice: "When you hear a woman say she hates a man as much as that, you may be sure she's hankering after him all the time."

Again she seemed lost in her musings and stayed a minute thus, with lowered forehead, eyes downcast. At last she spoke again:

"Yes, and it only shows how true that is, what I've just said; it was Clara herself, right in the middle of their honeymoon—would you ever believe it?—who asked Hirsch to come to Italy. I don't know exactly what happened after that. Anyhow, Aaron must have caught them together; otherwise he wouldn't have wanted to drown himself. The one thing I've never quite made out is just what Clara was after. Why did she jump into the boat alongside her husband? To stop him from killing himself? Or did she intend to die with him? Either theory would fit. Think of that last talk of theirs together, out on the lake in the middle of the night! What passed between them there? Over and over again I've put myself the question. Did she blurt out the whole truth in that cynical way she had? She was quite capable of doing so. Did Aaron decide to do away with her, just to make sure *that* could never happen again after he was dead? Their boat was recovered next day, empty; the bodies were found together several days later. But the queerest thing of all to my mind is that Hirsch should have sent for me to come quite early that evening, before the telegraph-office closed and before even the search party had gone out to look for them… . Anyhow," she continued after some pensive moments, "you must have seen all about it in the papers—only you didn't pay much attention, I suppose. The Italian police held an inquiry, and the French police took a hand in it too, They had searches made at my place and Aaron's, but they never solved the mystery; I know more about it than they do."

"And they never got on the tracks of your friend Hirsch?"

She drew herself up abruptly.

"No," she coolly replied, "they did *not* get on the tracks of my friend Hirsch."

There was a hint of truculence in her voice and in the glance she flung at Antoine, but he took no notice, for often, when she talked of her experiences, she affected a rather provocative tone; it seemed as if she took a delight in startling the man who, on the evening when first they met, had impressed her so profoundly.

"No, they didn't get on his track," she repeated with a chuckle, "but he thought it wiser not to come back to France that year."

"Are you really quite sure it was she, his daughter, in the middle of her honeymoon, who …?"

"Pretty sure," she replied, then, flinging her arms about him with the passion she always manifested when their conversation turned on Hirsch, she sealed his lips with an imperious kiss. "Ah," she sighed, nestling to his breast, "you're so different from everyone else. You're generous and kind. You're straight. Oh, how I love you, Toine dear!" When Antoine, his mind still haunted by her story, showed signs of questioning her further, she was firm in her refusal. "No, that's enough on the subject. It works me up too much; I'd rather forget, forget everything—for as long as I can. Hold me tight, darling, and be nice to me … yes, hug me, like that … closer, still closer— and help me to forget!"

He clasped her in his arms; but then, from the depths of his unconscious self, a craving for adventure, like a new instinct, flared into sudden life. Ah, could he only swerve from the rut of a too orderly existence, make a new start, live dangerously and divert to free, spontaneous acts the energies which it had been his pride to lavish on laborious ends!

"Supposing we went right away, just you and I? Listen, why shouldn't we start life together, far away from Paris? You've no idea what a success I'd make of it!"

"What? You!" she laughed, lifting her lips to his.

He sobered down at once and smiled, to make believe he had not been in earnest.

"How I love you!" she murmured, poring on his face with a look of anguish he was destined to recall in after-days.

Antoine knew Rouen well; his father's family came of Norman stock, and some more or less near relatives of M. Thibault were still living there. Moreover, some eight years earlier, Antoine had been posted to Rouen for his military service.

He insisted on Rachel's coming with him before dinner across the bridges to an outlying suburb, swarming with troops, and led her along beside a never-ending barrack wall.

"There's the sick-ward!" Antoine announced delightedly, pointing to some lighted windows. "Do you see the second window there? That's the medical office. What days and days I've wasted in that room with damn near nothing to. do—why, I couldn't even read a book!—except keep an eye on a couple of malingerers and a few youngsters with a dose!" He laughed without a trace of rancour, then joyfully exclaimed: "What a change! Why, I'm the happiest man in the world today!"

She made no reply and slipped hastily in front of him; he did not notice she was on the brink of tears.

A picture-house announced *In Darkest Africa*. Antoine drew Rachel's attention to the poster, but she shook her head and hurried him back to their hotel.

While they dined, all his efforts to make her laugh were unavailing and, remembering why they had come here, he felt a little ashamed of his high spirits.

But the moment they were in the bedroom, she flung her arms round his neck.

"Don't be angry with me," she pleaded.

"Angry? What for?"

"For spoiling our trip like this."

He. was going to protest when she embraced him again.

"Oh, how I love you!" she repeated, almost as if she were talking to herself.

Early next morning they arrived at Caudebec. The heat was more oppressive than ever; a veil of scintillating mist hung over the wide river. A small hotel announced conveyances for hire and Antoine carried their luggage to it. The carriage they had ordered drew up, well before the appointed time, in front of the window near which they were breakfasting. Rachel hurried through the dessert and, refusing Antoine's aid, piled all her parcels into the hood, then, after explaining to the driver the route she wanted him to take, sprang gaily into the ancient victoria.

The nearer came the melancholy climax of their expedition, the more her spirits seemed to rise. She grew ecstatic over the countryside, each hill and each declivity, the crosses by the roadside, each village market-place. Everything came as a surprise to her; she might have never roamed beyond the suburbs of some great city.

"Look at those hens! And that palsied old crone over there, toasting in the sun! And that grade-crossing barrier with a great chunk of stone to weigh it down. Aren't they back numbers, the folk in these parts! Well, I warned you you were coming to the back of beyond, didn't I? And I wasn't far wrong."

When she caught sight of the roofs down in the valley, clustering round the spire of the little church of Gué-la-Rozière, she stood up in the carriage and her face lit up as if she were a wanderer returning to her native land.

"The graveyard's over on the left, a long way from the town. Behind those poplars. You'll see it in a minute… . Keep your horse at a trot through the village, please," she told the driver, as they came to the first houses of Gué.

Half hidden at the far end of grassy orchards, white house-fronts, striped with black and trimly capped with thatch, flashed back the sunlight through the apple-trees; the windows all were shuttered. They passed a slate-tiled building flanked by two sentinel yews.

"That's the town hall," Rachel cried delightedly. "Not a single thing has changed. That's where they fixed up the certificates and so forth. See that house over there? That's where baby's nurse used to live. Nice folk they were. They've gone away, or else I'd look them up and give the old girl a kiss. Hallo, that's where I stayed once. When I came, I put up where there happened to be a spare bed. I took my meals there; how I used to laugh at the funny way they talked! And they gaped at me as if I'd escaped from a menagerie. The old girls used to come and inspect me in bed—my pyjamas, you know. You'd never believe what back numbers they are in these parts. Nice people, for all that. They were terribly kind to me when baby died. After that I sent them heaps and heaps of things: candied fruit, ribbons for their bonnets, liqueurs for the cure." She stood up again. "The graveyard's there, just beyond that ridge. If you look well you'll see the graves, down in the hollow. Put your hand there—do you know why my heart's fluttering like that? I'm always in terror I shan't be able to find her again, poor little thing. We didn't care to take out a permanent lease, you see; everyone assured us that wasn't the custom hereabouts. And, every time I come, I can't help thinking to myself: 'Suppose they've bundled her out of it!' They'd have the right, you know, if they did so… . Pull up in front of the pathway, driver; we'll walk to the gate… . Come along, be quick!"

Jumping down, she ran to the iron gate, opened it, and vanished round a wall. Almost immediately she came into sight again and called to Antoine.

"It's still there."

Sunlight fell full upon her face, where only joy was manifest. She vanished again and this time Antoine followed her. He found her standing, arms akimbo, gazing at a patch of weeds wedged in the angle between two walls; some vestiges of masonry showed through the nettles.

"It's there all right, but what a state it's in! Yes, poor kid, your grave could do with a brush-up—and, just think, I pay them twenty francs a year to look after it!"

She turned to Antoine, and now her voice sounded almost diffident, as though she craved his indulgence for a caprice.

"Toine dear, would you mind very much taking off your hat?"

Blushing, Antoine removed his hat.

"Poor little darling!" she suddenly exclaimed, and rested her hand on Antoine's shoulder, while her eyes filled with tears. "To think I wasn't even with her when she died! I came too late. She was such a sweet little thing, just like a little angel, and so pale… ." Then, in a sudden change of mood, she wiped her eyes and smiled. "Well, it's a queer sort of expedition I've brought you on, isn't it? Of course it's ancient history in a way, but one can't help feeling it all the same. It's just as well we have work before us—it takes one's mind off things. Come along!"

She insisted on going back to the carriage and, refusing the driver's help, carried her packages to the graveyard. There, waving Antoine aside, she unfastened them herself, kneeling on the ground. On an adjoining tombstone she alined methodically a bill-hook, a shovel, and a mallet; last of all a big cardboard box containing a wreath woven of strings of white beads.

"Now I know why it was so heavy," said Antoine smiling.

She drew herself up gaily.

"Look here, stop ragging and lend us a hand for a change. Off with your coat! Here, take this pruning-hook! We've got to root up, or hack away somehow, all those damned weeds which have overgrown everything. See those bricks there, underneath? That's the grave. She had such a mite of a coffin, and it didn't weigh much either, poor darling! Pass me that, please. It's all that's left of a wreath; a pretty old one, that. 'In memory of our darling daughter.' Zucco brought it. I'd had nothing to do with him for a year, but I thought I ought to let him know about it all the same—you understand, don't you? Anyhow he did the right thing; he put in an appearance, in mourning, too. What's more, I was really glad he'd come; I didn't feel so lonely at the funeral. Silly of me, but there you are! Hallo, that's the cross. Set it up straight, please; we can bank it up with earth afterwards."

As he drew aside a wisp of grass, Antoine had a shock; a first glimpse had not revealed the entire inscription: "Roxane Rachel Goepfert." The "Roxane" had been hidden, and he had only seen *her* name. For some seconds he stood there, lost in thought.

"Now then," Rachel admonished him. "Let's get down to it! We'll begin here."

Antoine "got down to it" with a will; he was no believer in half-measures. In his shirt-sleeves, brandishing pruning-hook and shovel, he very soon was sweating like a ditch-digger.

"Now for the wreaths," she said. "Pass them to me and I'll clean them one by one. Hallo, there's one missing! Can't you find it? It's Hirsch's, the best of the lot. In china flowers, it was. Well, I must say, that's a bit thick!"

Antoine watched her with amusement; hatless, the red tangle of her hair burning in the sunlight, lips curling with scorn and indignation, her skirts tucked up and sleeves rolled to her elbows, she raged about the churchyard, from first to final grave, muttering imprecations.

"Someone's gone and lifted it, the dirty thief—damn him!"

When she came back she seemed disheartened.

"And I was so fond of it! They've chopped it up into trinkets, I suppose. Yes, they're a primitive lot, all right! Still"-—her anger evaporated as if by magic—"I've spotted some yellow sand over there which will brighten things up no end."

With the passing minutes the little grave was taking on a new aspect; the cross, trued up again and hammered into the ground, rose high above a brick rectangle, meticulously cleared of weeds; a narrow border of sand, laid all around it, added the finishing touch to a neat, well-kept grave.

They had not noticed the horizon clouding up, and some premonitory raindrops took them by surprise. A storm was gathering above the valley. Under the leaden sky the tombstones seemed to grow whiter yet, the grass more green.

"Hurry up!" Rachel cried. She cast a mothering glance towards the tiny grave. "Yes, we've made a good job of it. Why, it might be a little cottage garden!"

Antoine had espied in a corner of the graveyard two saffron-hearted roses on a drooping branch, tossing in the breeze. He thought of laying them in token of farewell on little Roxane's grave, but could not bring himself to make the romantic gesture, which would come so much better from the child's mother. He picked the roses and handed them to Rachel.

Taking them from his hand, she thrust the stems hastily into her blouse.

"Thanks," she said, "but we must hurry or my hat will be ruined."

Without looking back, she ran to the carriage, holding up her skirts under the downpour.

The driver had taken out his horse, and man and beast were sheltering in a hollow of the hedge. Antoine and Rachel took cover under the hood, spreading on their knees the heavy apron reeking of musty leather. She was laughing, amused at the trick the elements had played on them, and rejoicing, too, in a sense of duty done.

It was only a summer shower. Soon the rain abated, the clouds sheered off towards the east. Across the clear, pellucid air the setting sun shone out again in blinding splendour. The driver began to harness his horse, and some children came along the road, driving before them a flock of rain-drenched geese. A little boy of nine or ten climbed onto the step and hailed them in a shrill, childish voice:

"It's nice to be in love, ain't it, mister?"

He jumped off again; they heard his clogs clattering down the road.

Rachel burst out laughing.

"Back numbers?" Antoine chuckled. "The rising generation strikes me as being very much up-to-date."

At last the vehicle was ready to take the road. It was too late to catch the train at Caudebec and they had to drive directly to the nearest main-line station. As Antoine had not arranged for a substitute at the hospital on Monday morning, he was bound to return to Paris that night.

The driver persuaded them to halt at Saint-Ouen-la-Noue for supper. The inn was thronged with the usual Sunday night crowd of topers. The new-comers were allotted one of the back rooms.

They ate in silence. Rachel's joviality had spent itself and she was musing on the past—that evening when at this very hour, after the funeral, she had driven to this inn in a similar, perhaps the same, conveyance; but then the famous tenor had been her companion. Most vivid memory of all was the dispute that had flared up between them almost at once. Zucco had grown violent and dealt her a blow —just there it had happened, in front of that corn-bin. But that very night she had given herself to him again in one of the bedrooms overhead, and for the next four months she had once more put up with his brutal ways, his boorishness. Still, she bore him little malice; there was even a certain sensual thrill in her memories of the man and of the blow he had inflicted. But she took good care not to tell Antoine the story; she had never confessed to him in so many words that the singer used to beat her… . Then another and more poignant memory loomed through the darkness of her thoughts, and now she realized that she had dallied all this time with other fancies only to shake off its obsession.

She rose.

"Shall we walk to the station?" she suggested. "The train's not due till eleven. The driver can bring along the luggage."

"What? A five-mile tramp along these muddy roads, in the middle of the night?"

"Why not?"

"I never heard of such an idea!"

"Oh," she sighed, "then I'd have got there fagged out and that would have done me no end of good!" But, without further protest, she followed him to the waiting carriage.

The night was pitch-dark, the air refreshed by rain. No sooner was she seated than she prodded the driver's back with her parasol.

"Drive slowly, please; as slowly as you like. We've heaps of time." Then she snuggled up to Antoine, murmuring: "It's such a lovely night; I'm so comfy, like this."

But when, a moment later, he lightly stroked the cheek that nestled against his shoulder, he felt it wet with tears.

"My nerves are all upset," she exclaimed, and moved her face away. Then suddenly she flung herself into his arms. "Oh, my darling, keep me, hold me close, close in your arms!"

They were silent now, locked in each other's arms. Trees and houses, briefly lit up by the carriage-lamps, flickered into phantom life and died into the darkness. A host of stars spangled the zenith. Rachel's drooping head swayed to and fro on Antoine's shoulder with each lurch of the ramshackle conveyance; now and again she drew herself up and her arms tightened round his shoulders.

"Oh, how I love you!"

They were the only passengers awaiting the Paris train on the platform of the little junction. They took shelter under a shed. Rachel, still in silent mood, held Antoine's arm.

Porters were bustling hither and thither in the darkness, swinging their lanterns over the rain-drenched platform and lighting it with evanescent gleams.

"Stand back for the express!"

With a rattle and a roar the express hurtled past, a black fire-eyed mastodon, whirling aloft whatever might take wing, draining away the very air behind it. The tumult passed; silence closed in again. Suddenly above their heads the thin, exasperating buzzing of an electric bell announced the coming of their train.

There was only half a minute's halt and they had barely time to scramble into a compartment, no time to choose one. Three other passengers were in their carriage, sound asleep; visored in blue, the roof-lamp glimmered wanly. Rachel took off her hat and sank into the only remaining corner-seat. Antoine sat down at her side, but, instead of leaning towards him, she pressed her forehead against the window.

In the half-light her hair, which glowed in sunshine orange-yellow, almost pink, had lost its normal hue, changed to a white-hot, molten fluorescence, like spun glass or a metallic floss. Her cheeks were bathed in a phosphorescent sheen which made the skin seem insubstantial, wraithlike. Antoine clasped Rachel's hand, which lay drooping on the cushions. Thinking he had seen her shiver, he questioned her in a low voice; her only response was a febrile pressure of his hand; she did not turn in his direction. He had no inkling of what might be passing in her mind. He remembered her demeanour in the graveyard, her nervous attack at the inn; could the errand which had brought them there account for it? Yet she had seen it through cheerfully enough. He could make nothing of her present mood.

When they reached Paris, and their fellow-travellers, struggling to their feet, unmasked the lamp, he noticed that her eyes were fixed on the ground. He followed her in silence through the crowd and only when they were in the taxi did he venture a question.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me what it is, Rachel."

"Leave me in peace! Can't you see it's over now?"

"No, I won't leave you in peace. I've the right … Now do tell me what it is."

Raising her tear-stained face, she gazed at him with a look of utter despair.

"No, I can't tell you what it is." But then her self-control broke down and she flung herself into his arms. "I'll never have strength enough, my darling; never, never, never …!"

In a flash he knew his happiness was drawing to an end; Rachel would leave him, pass from his life—and there was nothing, nothing at all, that he could do against it. He realized the bitter truth without a word from her and long before he guessed what lay behind it, even before the sorrow of it touched his life; it was as if he had always, from the first, been prepared for this to happen.

In silence they climbed the stairs and entered Rachel's flat. She left him to himself for a few moments in the pink room. He stood there, bereft of thought, gazing vacantly at the bed, the dressing-table, the alcove—at all that had become a second home to him. She had taken off her cloak when she came back to the room. He watched her enter, shut the door, come near him, her eyes veiled by the golden lashes, her lips close-set and enigmatic.

His courage gave way, and he stumbled towards her, stammering:

"But you can't mean it, surely you can't? You're not really going to leave me?"

Then she sat down and in a weary, broken voice asked him to face it calmly; she had a long journey before her, a business trip to the Belgian Congo. She launched into explanations. Her father's estate, every sou he had, had been invested by Hirsch in an oil-refinery which hitherto had done very well indeed and paid good dividends. But recently one of the managers had died, and now she had learned that the other manager, who was running the factory at present, was hand in glove with some wealthy business-men from Brussels who had just established at Kinchassa—in close proximity, that was—a rival factory, and the Belgians were doing their utmost to ruin the concern in which she, Rachel, was interested. (As she went on, her voice grew rather more assured.) The situation was complicated, moreover, by political intrigues. The Miiller group was backed by the Belgian government. There was no one she could trust on the spot. Her entire fortune was in jeopardy, her material welfare and her future. She had thought things over, tried to find some other way out. Hirsch was living in Egypt and quite out of touch with the Congo at present. The only solution was to go there herself and set the business on its feet again, or dispose of it to the Miiller group at a suitable price.

Vanquished by her coolness, Antoine heard her out, pale-faced, with tight-set lips.

"But" —he ventured at last to intervene— "surely it won't take you so very long?"

"That depends."

"How long? A month? More than that … two months?" There was a tremor in his voice. "Or three months?"

"Yes."

"Less, perhaps."

"Hardly less. Why, it takes a month to get there!"

“Supposing we could find someone to send instead? Someone you could depend on?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“How could I rely on anyone during the month or so he’d be out of my control? With my rivals over there only too ready to grease his palm!”

There was no arguing against the logic of it. As a matter of fact, a word had been hovering on his lips ever since she began her explanation—the query: when? All other questions could bide their time. He made a timid move towards her, and murmured in a humble voice which curiously belied the masterful set of his features:

“Lulu dear, you’re not thinking of leaving me at once, are you? Do please tell me.”

“No, not at once. But quite soon.”

He mustered up all his courage.

“When?”

“When I’ve got everything ready. I can’t say exactly.”

Their fixity of purpose wavered in the ensuing silence. Antoine could read on Rachel’s haggard face that she was near her breaking-point, and he too felt his will-power ebbing. He went up to her, pleaded with her again.

“You don’t really mean it, do you? You’re not going to … go away?”

She strained him to her breast and drew him stumblingly towards the bed; they fell across it, locked in each other’s arms.

“Don’t speak,” she whispered. “Don’t ask me anything. Say nothing more about it … nothing at all—or I shall go away at once, without a word of warning!”

Desolate and defeated, he kept silence, and now, in his turn, fell to weeping, crushing his face upon her loosened hair.

# XIV

RACHEL kept her word, and for a whole month turned a deaf ear to any further questions. Whenever she detected a certain flicker of anxiety in Antoine's eyes, she looked away. It was a terrible month; life went on its usual way, and yet no act, no thought, but had its repercussion on their suffering.

On the day after she broke the news to him, Antoine had summoned up all his strength of mind to see him through, but it had failed him; he was appalled to find his grief so poignant, ashamed of having it so little under control. A disturbing suspicion had crossed his mind: "Can it be that I'm …?" and, close on its heels, another thought: "Anyhow, I mustn't let others see it." It was as well for him the duties of his calling gave him no respite, and daily, as he crossed the precincts of the hospital, professional instinct got the upper hand again and saw him through the day; at each bedside his thoughts were only for the patient. But in his spells of leisure—between two visits, or at the family table (for M. Thibault was back in Paris and, since the beginning of October, their domestic life followed the old routine)—the mood of irremediable gloom, for ever brooding in the background of his mind, bore down on him, and he grew inattentive, quick to take offence; it seemed that all the energy on which he used to pride himself could find its only outlet now in fits of temper.

He spent his evenings and every night with Rachel; joyless evenings, joyless nights. All that they said, even their silences, were poisoned by unuttered thoughts, and their embraces quickly wore them out, yet never slaked their almost hostile craving each for each.

One evening at the beginning of November when he was about to enter Rachel's flat, Antoine found the door wide open. Bare walls. A carpetless floor. The whole aspect of the hall had changed. He rushed into the flat. His footsteps echoed emptiness, and in the pink bedroom the alcove gaped, a meaningless recess.

He heard sounds in the kitchen and ran there, panic-stricken. He saw the concierge on her knees, fumbling with a pile of discarded garments. Antoine snatched from her hand the letter she held up to him. His heart began to beat again once he had read the first few lines; no, Rachel had not left Paris yet, she was waiting for him in a neighbouring hotel and would not be leaving for Le Havre till the following night. At once he fell to planning a campaign of lies that would enable him to take the night and morning off, and see Rachel on board her boat.

He spent most of the following day in unsuccessful attempts to arrange this, and it was not till six o'clock that everything had been settled, a substitute provided, and he was free to go.

He joined Rachel at the station, where she was busy registering a pile of brand-new trunks. She looked pale, much older, and wore a tailor-made costume that he had not seen before.

It was not till the following morning, at the Havre hotel, when he was trying to steady down his throbbing nerves in a boiling hot bath, that something he had vaguely noticed yesterday flashed through his mind, vivid as lightning and as startling: Rachel's luggage was marked "R.H."

He sprang out of the water, flung open the bathroom door.

"You … you're going back to Hirsch!"

To his utter bewilderment Rachel's face lit up with a tender smile.

"Yes," she whispered, but so faintly that he caught only a far-off sibilance; then he saw her eyelids flutter an avowal, and she nodded twice.

He sank into a chair. Some minutes passed. No word of reproach rose to his lips, and it was not grief or jealousy that bowed his shoulders now, only a sense of his own powerlessness, the crushing load of life; they were puppets in the hands of fate.

A shivering fit reminded him that he was wet and naked.

"You'll catch cold," she said. So far no word had passed between them.

Hardly aware what he was doing, Antoine dried himself and began to dress. She remained standing there, as she had been when he burst in, leaning against the radiator, a nail-file in her hand. For all their sorrow, both of them, he hardly less than she, were conscious of a vague relief. How often during the past month had Antoine felt that something was being kept back from him! Now, at least, the truth in all its stark reality lay bare before his eyes. And Rachel, shaking off the irksome trammels of her lie, could feel her sense of dignity return, and be herself again.

At last she broke the silence.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have told a lie!" Love shone on her face, and pity, unshadowed by the least remorse. "What a lot of silly notions one has about jealousy—false, conventional ideas! Anyhow, I assure you, it was only for your sake—to spare you—that I lied; personally, it only made me more miserable than ever. But now I'm glad I haven't got to go away with a lie between us."

He made no comment, but stopped dressing and sat down.

"Yes," she went on, "Hirsch has asked me to return, and I am going back to him."

She paused again and, now she understood his silence was deliberate, all the thoughts she had kept back so long clamoured for utterance.

"It's sweet of you, Toine dear, not to say anything—thank you! For, oh, my darling, don't I know all that might be said? I've been arguing it out with myself for weeks and weeks. It's pure madness, what I'm doing—but nothing could stop me from doing it. I suppose you think it's Africa that tempts me, the call of the wild, as they say. Well, there's something in that, of course; sometimes that call's so urgent that I'm positively sick with longing. But that, by itself, wouldn't have been enough. Or perhaps you think I'm acting from mercenary motives. There's some truth in that, too. Hirsch is going to marry me; he's immensely rich and at my age—you may say what you like—marriage has its importance; it's pretty hard spending all one's days on the outside edge of things. But

there's more in it than that. I really think that I'm a bit above such considerations, so far as anyone who's a Jew, or half a Jew, can be above them. Here's a proof of it: you're a rich man, or will be one; well, you might ask me to marry you tomorrow, but I wouldn't give up my plan of going away.

"I know I'm hurting you, Toine darling, but do be brave and hear me out; it does me good to tell you everything. For your sake, too—it's better for you to know all. … I thought of killing myself. Morphine gives you a quick death, with no fuss, no pain. I even bought the bottle; I threw it away yesterday before leaving Paris. I want to live, you see; I never really, really wished to die. You never seemed jealous when I spoke of him—and you were right. It's he, as you very well know, who should be jealous of you. I love you, dear, I love you as I've never loved anyone before; and—I hate him! Why shouldn't I own to it? I hate him. He's not a man, he's a … I don't know what. I hate him and he terrifies me. Time after time he's beaten me. And he'll beat me again—kill me, who knows? He, anyhow, is jealousy itself. Once on the Ivory Coast he bribed one of our porters to strangle me. Do you know why? Because he imagined his boy had come to my hut one night, to see me. No, he'd stop at nothing!

"At nothing!" she repeated in a brooding voice. "But one can't stand up against him. Listen to this—I've never dared to tell you about it before. You remember when I went to Pallanza after the tragedy—when he sent for me? Well, that's when it all began. Yet I'd guessed the truth and I was scared to death of him. One day I didn't dare to drink a cup of tea he'd made for me, because of the queer smile on his face when he brought it. And yet, in spite of that, in spite of all … Do you understand? No, you simply can't conceive the curious fascination of that man!"

Antoine shivered again. Rachel wrapped a dressing-gown round his shoulders and went on in a cool, unemotional voice:

"Don't imagine he had to use threats, or force. He had only to bide his time; that was all and he knew it, he knew his power. Why, it was I who went and knocked at his door! And it as only on the second night that he opened it to me. Then I gave up everything to go away with him; I didn't return to France. I followed him everywhere, like a dog, like his shadow. For two, nearly three, years I put up with everything—blows, exhaustion, ill-treatment, prison … everything! For three years I couldn't look a day ahead without being terrified of what might happen. Sometimes we had to stay in hiding for weeks on end, without daring to go out of doors. At Salonika there was a terrible scandal, we had all the Turkish police hunting us down; we had to change our names five times before we could make the frontier. Always the same story, trouble over his … propensities. In one of the London suburbs he managed to buy up a whole family—a prostitute from the slums, her two sisters, and her little brother; his 'mixed grill,' he called it. One day the police surrounded the house and nabbed us. We had three months in the lock-up over that. But he managed to get us off in the end. Oh, if I started telling you everything …! The things I've seen, the things I've been through!

"I can see you saying to yourself: 'Now I know why she left him.' Well, you're wrong; it wasn't I who left him. I told you a lie. I could never have done it. It was he who told me to go. He roared with laughter. 'Clear out!' he said. 'When I want you, you'll come back right enough!' I spat in his face. Now, do you want to hear the truth? Since I came back, I've never been able to stop thinking of him. I've been waiting, waiting. And now at last he has told me to return. Now do you understand why I'm going?"

She went to Antoine and knelt before him, resting her head on his knee, sobbing. He gazed down at her shoulders, shaken with sobs. He, too, was trembling.

"How I love you, my darling!" she murmured, closing her eyes.

All day, as though they had made a pact of silence, they spoke no more of all these things. What good would it have been? At lunch they had to sit face to face, and now and again his eyes and hers, haunted by a like obsession, drew together, then resolutely turned aside. What good would it have been?

She had some small purchases to make and lingered over them as long as possible, feigning to be interested. Rain-squalls, sweeping inland from the sea, sluiced down the streets and hissed along the house-fronts. Antoine followed her meekly from shop to shop till it was dinner-time. She did not even need to book a berth in the mail-steamer, as she was travelling by the *Romania*, a freighter which carried some passengers, and put in at Le Havre on her way from Ostende at about five a.m., sailing an hour later. Hirsch was to meet her at Casablanca. There had not been a word of truth in her story about the Congo oil-refinery.

They spun the dinner out as long as possible; the prospect of retiring to their bedroom and being alone together for this final night made cowards of them both. The cafe into which they drifted consisted of one huge, crowded room, noisy and brightly lit; drinking-hall, billiard-room, and dance-floor were combined in one and, in a blue haze of tobacco-smoke, the click of. billiard-balls fretted the languid throb of waltzes. When it was nearly ten a troupe of strolling Italians made a sudden entry; there were a dozen of them, red-shirted, white-trousered fellows, flaunting Neapolitan fishing-caps whose tassels dangled on their shoulders. They jigged and capered with demoniac glee, yelling at the top of their voices, and playing, as they danced, on violins and castanets, guitars and tambourines. Antoine and Rachel watched them gratefully, glad of this foolish respite from the bane of thought; but, when the merry-makers had sung their last and passed the hat round, their grief flared up with new intensity. They rose and, shivering in the downpour, walked back to the hotel.

It was midnight. Rachel was to be called at three a.m. Flurries of wild November rain beat on the iron balcony, and, huddled side by side like two forlorn, lost children, they spent their last, brief night together, without a word … without desire.

Once only Antoine spoke.

"Are you cold?"

She was trembling violently.

"No," she replied, and nestled up against him, as though even now he still might rescue her, might save her from herself. "No, I'm frightened."

He let it pass, for he was almost tired of trying, always in vain, to understand her.

There was a knock at the door and, springing from the bed, she cut short their last embrace. He was grateful to her, for each depended on the other's fortitude to see it through.

They dressed in silence, with studied calmness, giving each other now and then a helping hand, keeping up to the bitter end the habits of their life in common. He helped her to close a recalcitrant suitcase, kneeling on it with all his weight while, squatting on the floor, she turned the key. When at last everything was ready and the time past for commonplace remarks, when she had strapped her rugs together, put on her hat, pinned her veil, slipped on her gloves, and buttoned up the cover of her dressing-case, there were still

some minutes to go before the cab arrived. She sank into a low chair near the door. A shivering fit came on her and, setting her jaws to stop her teeth from chattering, she crouched there, her hands clasped round her knees. Equally at a loss for anything to say or do, Antoine perched himself on a pile of trunks, with dangling arms, not daring to approach her. The moments dragged by in an agonizing silence, dark with forebodings, each moment charged with suffering so keen that, under its strain, they must have broken down, had they not known that in a few more seconds the end would come. A memory flashed through Rachel's mind—the custom of certain Slav tribes who, when someone they love is setting forth on a long journey, form a circle and sit around the pilgrim for a while, in silent meditation. She all but spoke her thought aloud, but feared her voice might fail her.

When she heard, outside the door, the footsteps of the men coming to take her luggage, she suddenly raised her head and swung her body round towards him. Such love shone in her eyes, such sheer despair and terror, that he flung out his arms towards her.

"My dearest!"

The door opened and the men streamed into the room. Rachel rose. She had waited for others to be present before she said goodbye. She moved towards Antoine, stood beside him. He dared not put his arms around her lest he should never let her go. For the last time, the last, he felt under his lips the warm, soft pressure of her trembling mouth. He heard, or seemed to hear, a whisper:

"Goodbye, goodbye … my darling."

With a swift movement she drew away, vanished without a look behind into the passage. He stared towards the open door, twisting his hands together, and his only feeling was a dull amazement.

She had made him promise not to escort her to the steamer, but it was understood between them that he would go to the far end of the northern jetty and, standing at the foot of the lighthouse, watch the *Romania* putting out to sea. The moment he heard the cab drive away, he rang and gave instructions for his luggage to be carried to the cloak-room; he did not wish to have to see this room again. Then he flung out into the darkness.

Shrouded in dripping mist, the town looked like a city of the dead. Overhead an angry wrack of storm still lowered, while another cloud-bank rose on the horizon, and, as the masses drew together, the zone of limpid sky between them seemed to melt away.

After walking blindly ahead for a while, Antoine halted under a street-lamp and, struggling against the serried impact of wind and rain, unfolded a map of the city. Fog blinded his eyes, but the sound of breakers and a distant wail of sirens gave him his direction. At last, groping his way across an expanse of slippery mud, in the teeth of a sea-wind that slapped his overcoat against his legs, he reached a rough-hewn quay and struggled on along it.

The breakwater narrowed as it advanced into the waves. On his right the open sea thundered in massive cadences; leftwards he heard the waters of the harbour lapping in restless undertones. Louder and louder in his ears, though he could not locate the sound, a fog-horn bellowed through the darkness. Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

After he had tramped ahead for ten minutes without meeting a soul on the way, Antoine suddenly perceived almost above his head the beam of the lighthouse, which till now the fog had veiled. He had come to the end of the breakwater.

He halted at the foot of the steps leading up to the platform and tried to take his bearings, cut off from the world in a wild turmoil of wind and waves. Just before his eyes a streak of livid light proclaimed the east, where over other lands a wintry dawn was rising. At his feet a flight of steps, hewn in the granite, descended to the water's edge, but, though he peered into the dark abyss, he could not see the waves fretting against the sea-wall; he could only hear their measured breathing, almost at his feet, a long-drawn sigh, ending in a muted sob.

The minutes passed, but he was unaware of their passing. Little by little the canopy of vapour that screened him from the world of living men grew less opaque. Now he could perceive an intermittent glow upon the southern jetty, and dared not lift his eyes from the pale void between him and the further lighthouse, for there it was, along that silvery expanse between the harbour-lights, that she would pass.

Suddenly, to the left of where his eyes were fixed, a dark mass hove into sight, framed in the aureole of golden haze heralding the dawn. Tall and slender, slowly taking form against the white effulgence, it became a ship, a huge and hueless hull stippled with lights and drawing in its wake a low, dark ribbon of smoke.

The Romania was swinging round to make the fairway.

His hands clenched on the iron rail, his cheeks lashed by the rain, Antoine, unknowing what he did, began to count the decks and masts and funnels… . Suddenly he awakened from his trance. Rachel—Rachel was there, only a few hundred yards away, straining towards him as now he strained towards her, watching him with unseeing eyes, blinded with tears; and all their ruined love that urged them for the last time each to each was powerless to grant that final consolation, a gesture of farewell. Only the shaft of light, veering in radiant circles over Antoine's head, touched with a fugitive caress the blind, dark mass that was passing, out of the mist into the mist, bearing hence its secret, this last precarious meeting of their eyes.

For a long time Antoine stood there with no mind to go, tearless and void of thoughts. His ears had grown accustomed to the fog-horn and no longer heard its piercing blasts. At last he glanced at his watch, and started back to the town. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he splashed his way ahead through pools of water, without seeing them. The dockyards on the sea-front were ablaze with violet light and the thudding of hammers set up dull vibrations in the fogbound air. Beyond the beach, on which a flood-tide beat, the city glimmered like the fabric of a dream. Long trains of trucks clattered across the gravel to an accompaniment of shouts and cracking whips. It was a relief to Antoine to regain the world of human sounds, and he paused to listen to the iron rims grinding upon the stones.

Suddenly it occurred to him that his train did not leave till ten; not once so far had he bethought himself of the three hours of waiting. Rachel's departure had meant the beginning and the end of his preoccupations. What was to be done about it? The hateful prospect of those three empty hours was the last straw; he yielded to his grief and, leaning against the paling beside him, broke down and wept.

Unconsciously he started on again, walking straight ahead. Life was returning to the streets, and hordes of draggled children were wrangling for first turn at the street-fountains. Huge vans, spanning the roadway, thundered down towards the docks. Presently he grew aware that it was broad daylight and he was standing amongst the flower-stalls in the market-square facing their hotel; here it was that yesterday, just before dinner, he had been on the point of buying a sheaf of chrysanthemums for Rachel. But then the same

motive had deterred him as that which had led them to refrain, till it was time to part, from any gesture, any word, that might weaken their fixed resolve, open the flood-gates of a grief they strove their hardest to repress.

He suddenly remembered that he had his cloak-room ticket to pick up at the office of the hotel, and he was seized by a desire once more to see their room. But it was no longer free; two women had just engaged it.

In a mood of blank despair he walked down the steps and drifted aimlessly across another square; then, recognizing a street in which they had walked together, he retraced his steps to the cafe where the Neapolitans had given their performance. An impulse to enter it came over him.

He tried to discover the table where they had dined, the waiter who had served them; but somehow everything seemed changed. A garish light flowed in through the glazed roof, transforming the scene of nightly revelry into a place of squalor, like a bleak, abandoned warehouse. Chairs were stacked upon the tables and, with its prostrate music-stands, a 'cello cribbed in its black coffin, the piano draped in oilcloth like the scaly hide of some dead pachyderm, the bandsmen's platform might have been a raft piled high with corpses, adrift on a sea of dust.

"By your leave, sir!"

A waiter was preparing to sweep the floor under the table. Antoine swung his legs up onto the seat and idly watched the busy broom at work. A cork, two matches, a scrap of orange-peel—no, a tangerine, more likely. A gust of wind drove through, the room, fanning the dusty litter into movement. The waiter coughed. Antoine woke from his trance; had he missed the train? He sprang from his seat, spied out a clock; no, he had been here only seven miserable minutes.

He decided against sitting down again, and went out. Haunted by the notion that, were he once seated in the train, his grief would be allayed, he jumped into a cab and set out for the station, as to a haven of refuge.

But, when he had booked his luggage through, he still had time and to spare. Over an hour to go! He set to walking up and down the platform with hurried strides, as though an enemy were at his heels. "What the hell do *you* want with me?" he muttered, glaring at an engineer who was eyeing him from the running-board of his locomotive. Turning round, he noticed a group of railway hands observing him curiously.

Then, stiffening his back, he retraced his steps, opened the door of the waiting-room, and sank into a chair. The room was bleak and gloomy; he had it to himself. Outside an old woman was squatting against the glass door with her back to him; he could see her grey hair bobbing up and down as she dandled a child in her arms, crooning in a toneless, yet almost girlish voice the old song with its sickly-sweet refrain that Mademoiselle so often sang to Gisèle in the past:

"We'll go no more afishing,
Afishing in the sea …"

His eyes filled with tears. Ah, if only he could never hear another sound, see nothing, nothing more for ever!

He buried his face between his palms. And, in a flash, Rachel was -in his arms again! Last night his hands had toyed with her necklace and its fragrance clung about them still. He could feel the smooth curve of her shoulder against his chest; under his lips the warm, soft texture of her skin. So violent was the shock it gave him that he jerked his head back, tautening every sinew; his fingers stiffened round the chair-arms and he thrust his head back violently into the thick upholstery. Something Rachel had said came back to him. "I thought of killing myself." Yes, to have done with it all! Suicide: for such despair as this, the one way out. An unpremeditated, almost involuntary death; simply to make an end, no matter how, of this intolerable spasm of anguish that gripped him like a vice, tightening across his temples—to cut it short before its unbearable climax!

Suddenly he started up from his seat; someone had approached him unawares and tapped him on the arm. He all but yielded to a blind impulse to lash out at the intruder, hurl him away.

"Here! Watcher gettin' at?" It proved to be a venerable ticket-collector, going his rounds.

"The … the Paris train?" Antoine stammered.

"Platform Number 3."

Antoine stared blindly at him, like a sleep-walker, then moved away unsteadily towards the platform.

"There ain't no hurry," the old man shouted after him. "Train's not in yet." His eyes followed Antoine as he left the waiting-room, observed him stagger, colliding with the door.

"And these young 'uns think they're somebody!" he muttered under his breath, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully.

## PART IV
## THE CONSULTATION
# I

THE clocks were striking the half-hour after noon when the taxi halted in the Rue de l'Université. Antoine sprang out and plunged below the portico. "It's Monday," he reminded himself; "my consulting-day."

"Morning, sir!"

He swung round; in a corner of the lobby two little boys had taken shelter, apparently, from the wind, and the bigger of the two, cap in hand, perked up to Antoine a little bird-like face, round and restless as a sparrow's, but without a trace of shyness. Antoine halted.

"It's like this, sir; we want to know if you'll give some medicine to this kid here, what's ill."

Antoine went up to the "kid," who was hovering in the background.

"What's the trouble, my boy?"

A gust of wind, lifting the little boy's cape, revealed an arm in a sling.

"It isn't much," the older boy asserted confidently. "Not even an accident at his job, though he did get that ugly lump on his arm at the printing plant. It gives him twinges right up to his shoulder."

Antoine was pressed for time.

"Has he a temperature?"

"A what, sir?"

"Fever. Has he any fever?"

"Yes, that's what it must be," the elder boy agreed, wagging his head gravely and watching Antoine's face with an anxious eye.

"You'd better tell your parents to take him to the Charite at two and have him seen to—the big hospital over there on the left, you know."

A twitching of the little bird-like face, quickly controlled, betrayed the youngster's disappointment; then his lips half parted in a coaxing smile.

"I thought maybe you'd be nice enough …"

But he checked himself at once and went on in the tone of one who long has learned to bow to the inevitable:

"That's all right, sir. We'll fix it up somehow. Thank you, sir. Come along, Eddie!"

With a frank, good-humoured smile and a flick of his cap to Antoine, he began to move away towards the street.

Antoine's curiosity was aroused; he hesitated for a moment.

"Were you waiting for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who told you …?" He opened the door leading to the staircase. "Come in anyhow; don't stay out in the draught. Who told you to come here?"

"No one." The child's face lit up. "Of course I know you very well. Why, I'm the office boy at the lawyer's—at the bottom of the courtyard, you know."

Unthinkingly Antoine had clasped the hand of the little invalid beside him, and somehow he could never help being moved by the contact of a clammy palm or fevered wrist.

"Where do your parents live, my boy?"

The younger boy raised his lack-lustre eyes towards his companion.

"Robbie!"

Robert came to the rescue.

"We haven't any, sir," he said; then added after a short pause: "We're living in the Rue de Verneuil."

"Neither father nor mother?"

"No."

"Grandparents, perhaps?"

"No, sir."

The boy's composed expression, his candid eyes, made it evident he had no wish to play on Antoine's sympathy, or even curiosity; nor did he seem the least dejected. Indeed, it was Antoine, rather, whose amazement struck a puerile note.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"And—his age?"

"Thirteen and a half."

Confound them! Antoine thought. Why, it's a quarter to one already! I must telephone to Philip; lunch; see them upstairs; then go back to the Faubourg Saint-Honore before my consultations. Today of all days!

"Come along!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Let's have a look at it!"

Robert's face lit up with joy, though he did not seem at all surprised; to avoid meeting his happy eyes, Antoine stepped hastily in front of him, pulled out his latch-key, and opened the door of his flat. Then he shepherded the boys into his consulting-room.

Léon appeared at the kitchen door.

"Luncheon will have to wait a bit, Léon… . Now then, my boy" —he turned to he child— "hurry up and get your things off. Your brother will help you… . Gently does it… . Right, come here!"

A puny arm, swathed in a bandage that was almost clean. Just above the wrist a superficial boil, clearly defined, seemed to have come to a head. Antoine, no longer mindful of the passing minutes, laid his forefinger on the pustule while, with two fingers of the

other hand, he gently pressed another aspect of the swelling. Good! He could distincly feel the liquid shifting under his forefinger.

"Does it hurt there as well?" He ran his hand along the swollen forearm, then up along the upper arm as far as the dilated glands of the axilla.

"Only a little bit," the child whispered. He was holding himself stiffly, his eyes fixed on the other boy.

"No, it hurts a lot," Antoine corrected him gruffly. "But I can see you're a plucky little fellow." He fixed his gaze full on the child's eyes and, as the contact was established, a spark of sudden confidence flickered in their misted depths, then boldly leapt out towards him. When at last Antoine's lips relaxed into a smile, the little boy dropped his eyes at once. Antoine patted his cheek and gently lifted the boy's chin, which seemed to yield reluctantly.

"Look here! We'll make a tiny puncture just there and in half an hour it'll hardly hurt at all. Now then, come along with me!"

The child, duly impressed, advanced bravely enough for a few steps, but, as soon as Antoine's eyes were turned, his courage faltered, and he looked imploringly at his brother.

"Robbie! You come with me, too!"

The adjoining room, with its tiled floor, linoleum, sterilizer, and white-enamelled table placed under a powerful lamp, served on occasion for minor operations. In earlier days a bathroom, it had become what Léon styled "The Surgery." The ground-floor flat under M. Thibaults which Antoine and his brother used to share had proved quite inadequate, even after Antoine had become its only occupant. He had jumped at an opportunity which had recently presented itself of renting a four-room flat, also on the ground floor, in an adjoining house, and had shifted his consulting-room and bedroom to his new quarters, where he had had the "surgery" installed as well. His whilom consulting-room had been converted into the patients' waiting-room. A passage had been opened in the party-wall between the two flats, which were thus merged in one.

A few minutes later he was neatly puncturing the abscess with his scalpel.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, my boy… . Here goes! … Once more now. There, it's over!" Antoine stepped back a pace and the child, pale and half fainting, sank into his brother's waiting arms.

"Hi there, Léon!" Antoine shouted cheerfully. "A spot of brandy for these young hopefuls!" He dipped two lumps of sugar in a finger's depth of cognac. "Here, get your teeth into that! You, too!" He bent towards the little patient. "Not too strong for you?"

"It's nice," the child whispered, with a wan smile.

"Show me your arm. Don't be frightened. I told you it was over. Washing and bandaging—that doesn't hurt a bit."

A ring at the telephone; Léon's voice in the hall. "No, Madame, the doctor is engaged. Not this afternoon, it's the doctor's consulting-day. Oh, hardly before dinner-time. Very good, Madame, thank you."

"Yes, a gauze drain, to make sure," Antoine murmured. "Right. And the bandage pretty firm, that's essential… . Now you, big boy, listen to what I say. You'll take your brother home at once and seethat he's put to bed, to be sure he doesn't move his arm. Whom do you live with? Surely there's someone who looks after your little brother?"

"*I* do."

There was a glow of honest self-assurance in his eyes, and in his look such dignity that it was quite impossible to smile at the emphatic declaration. Antoine glanced at the clock and once more had to repress his curiosity.

"What number in the Rue de Verneuil?"

"37B."

"Robert what?"

"Robert Bonnard."

When he had jotted down the address Antoine looked up and saw the two boys side by side, gazing at him with candid eyes in which he read no trace of gratitude, but only self-surrender, illimitable confidence.

"Now then, young men, off you go! I'm in a hurry. I'll look in some time between six and eight to change the drain. Got that?"

"Yes, sir," replied the elder boy, who seemed to take it quite as a matter of course. "It's the top floor, room 3, opposite the stairs."

No sooner were the children gone than Antoine told Léon to serve luncheon. Then he went to the telephone.

"Hallo, Elysées 0132." On the hall table, beside the telephone, his engagement-book lay open. Holding the receiver to his ear, Antoine bent over it and read the entries: *1913. October 13. Monday. 2:30 p.m., Mme. de Battaincourt*. I shan't be back; she can wait, *3:30. Rumelles*, yes, *Lioutin*, right! *Mme. Ernst*, don't know her. *Vianzoni … de Fayelles*… . Right! Hallo, 0132? Is Professor Philip back yet? Dr. Thibault speaking." There was a pause. "Hallo! Good morning, Chief. Hope I'm not taking you from your lunch. It's about a consultation. Very urgent. Hequét's child. Yes, Hequét, the surgeon. … In a very bad way, I fear, hopeless; an otitis that's been neglected, all sorts of complications. I'll explain. … A bad business… . No, Chief, it's you he wants, he's set on seeing you. You surely can't refuse him that. … Of course, as soon as possible, immediately. I'm in the same boat, Monday's my consulting-day… . Right, that's settled then; I call for you at a quarter to. Thanks, Chief."

Hanging up the receiver, he went over the day's appointments once again. "Whew! What a day!" But the sigh was mere convention and his contented look belied it.

Léon stood before him, a rather fatuous grin rippling his clean-shaven cheeks.

"Do you know, sir, the cat had her kittens this morning?"

"Really?"

Smiling, Antoine followed his servant to the kitchen. Snug in a cosy nest of rags, the cat lay on her side amid a writhing mass of small black lumps of sticky fur which she was scrubbing vigorously with her rasp-like tongue.

"How many are there?"

"Seven. My sister-in-law would like one kept for her."

Léon was the concierge's brother. For the two years and more that he had been in Antoine's service he had performed his duties with ritual assiduity. He was a man of few words and uncertain age; his skin was colourless and on his elongated head straggled a scanty growth of pale, downy hair; his overlong, drooping nose and his trick of lowering his eyelids gave him an air of sheepishness, which his smile accentuated. But all this was only a convenient mask, even, perhaps, a studied pose; behind it lay a keen intelligence, shrewd common sense, and a natural gift of humour.

"How about the other six?" Antoine asked. "You'll drown them all, of course."

"Well, sir," Léon placidly replied, "do you wish me to keep them?"

Antoine smiled, turned on his heel, and hastened to the room which once was occupied by Jacques and now served as a dining-room.

His meal was all laid out ready on the table: an omelet, veal cutlets on spinach, and fruit; for Antoine could not endure waiting between courses. The omelet smelt deliciously of melted butter and the frying-pan… . Brief interlude of fifteen restful minutes between a morning at the hospital and the afternoon's engagements.

"No message from upstairs?"

"No, sir."

"Did Mme. Franklin telephone?"

"Yes, sir. She made an appointment for Friday. It's down in the book."

There was a ring at the telephone. "No, Madame," Léon answered, "he will not be free at five-thirty. Nor at six. Thank you, Madame."

"Who?"

"Mme. Stockney." He made bold to shrug his shoulders slightly. "About a friend's little boy. She will write."

"Who is this Mme. Ernst, at five?" Without waiting for an answer, he went on. "Will you ask Mme. de Battaincourt to excuse me? I shall be at least twenty minutes late. The newspapers, please. Thank you." He glanced at the clock. "They should have finished upstairs, eh? Give them a ring, please. Ask for Mile. Gisèle and bring the receiver here. At once, along with the coffee."

As he picked up the receiver his features relaxed and he smiled towards an unseen face, almost as though he had taken wings and been transported to the other end of the wire.

"Hallo! Yes, it's I. Yes, I've almost done… ." He began laughing. "No, grapes; a present from a patient, and very good they are! … And how are things upstairs?" As he spoke a shadow fell upon his face. "What? Before or after the injection? Anyhow the main thing is to convince him that it's quite normal." Another pause, and now his face brightened up again. "I say, Gise, are you by yourself at the phone? Look here, I must see you today. I've something to say to you. Something important. Why, here, of course. Any time you like after half-past three. Léon will see you don't have to wait… . Good. I'll just finish my coffee and come upstairs."

# II

ANTOINE had the key of his father's flat; he entered without ringing, and went directly to the linen-room.

"The master has been taken to the study," Adrienne informed him.

He made his way on tip-toe down a passage reeking like a pharmacy, to M. Thibault's dressing-room. "Curious the sort of oppression I always feel the moment I set foot inside this flat," he said to himself. "For a doctor, you'd think … But here, of course, it isn't the same for me as in other people's houses."

His eyes went straight to the temperature-chart pinned to the wall. The dressing-room looked like a laboratory; table and whatnot were littered with phials, china recipients, and packets of cotton-wool. "Let's have a look at the bottle," he said to himself. "Yes, it's as I thought; kidneys … the analysis will bring that out. And the morphine-—how much is gone?" He opened the box of ampoules whose labels he had camouflaged to keep the patient from suspecting anything. "Half a grain in twenty-four hours. Already! Let's see, where's the sister put—ah, here it is—the graduate."

With brisk, almost light-hearted gestures he set about the analysis; just as he was heating a test-tube over the alcohol-lamp the door creaked on its hinges; the sound made his heart beat faster and he turned hastily to see who had come in. But it was not Gise. It was Mademoiselle, bent double, like an old witch, who was ambling towards him; nowadays her stoop was so pronounced that, even when she craned her neck, she could hardly lift her eyes (which still shone bright as ever behind the smoked-glass spectacles) to the level of Antoine's hands. Were she in the least upset or frightened, her tiny forehead, yellow as old ivory between the snowy bandeaux, started swaying like a pendulum.

"Ah, so you've come, Antoine," she sighed and, in a voice that quavered with each wobble of her head, plunged into her subject: "Really, since yesterday, things have been going from bad to worse. Sister Céline took it into her head to waste two jars of broth and a quart of milk quite needlessly. She's always peeling bananas for him to eat—they cost a pretty penny, too—and then he won't touch them. And the things he leaves can't be used, because of the microbes. Oh, I've nothing against her, or anyone; she's a good, religious young woman. But do speak to her, Antoine, do tell her to stop! What's the good of pressing food on an invalid? Much better wait till he asks for it. But she's always trying to foist things on him. This morning it was an ice—just think! Imagine offering him an ice—why, the chill of it might make his heart stop! And where's Clotilde to find the time to go running round to the ice-man, with all the household to cook for? Tell me that!"

Antoine was patiently completing the test, giving her only non-committal grunts by way of answer. "She's had to put up with the old fellow's harangues," he said to himself, "for a quarter of a century without saying a word, and now she's getting even!"

"Do you know," the old lady went on, "how many mouths I have to feed—how many they come to with the nursing sister and Gise as well? Three in the kitchen, three of us, and then your father. Work it out for yourself! And really, considering I've turned seventy-five, and the state of my—"

She drew aside abruptly; Antoine had stepped back from the table and was on his way to the basin. She was still as terrified as ever of infection and disease; for a year past she had been obliged to live in the shadow of a serious illness, to rub shoulders with doctors and nurses and breathe a sick-room atmosphere; the experience had affected her like a slow poison taken in daily doses, and was hastening the general decline that had set in three years before. Moreover, she was not wholly unaware of her decrepitude. "Since it was His will," she would lament, "to take Jacques out of my life, I'm only the ghost of what I used to be."

When Antoine showed no sign of moving and went on lathering his hands above the basin, she took a timid step towards him.

"Talk to the sister, Antoine, do please give her a talking-to. She'll listen to *you*, anyhow."

He humoured her with a compliant "yes" and, paying no more attention to her, left the room. Her eyes glowed with affection as they followed his receding limbs, for (as she proclaimed) she had come to see in Antoine, since he so rarely answered her and never contradicted, "the light of her life."

He went out into the passage so as to enter his father's study from the hall, and seem to have just arrived.

M. Thibault was alone with the sister. "So Gise is in her bedroom," Antoine murmured; "she must have heard me go by. She's avoiding me."

"Good afternoon, Father," he said in the breezy manner that now he always assumed at his father's bedside. "Afternoon, Sister."

M. Thibault's eyelids lifted.

"Ah, there you are."

He was in his big arm-chair, upholstered in tapestry, which had been dragged beside the window. His head seemed to have become too heavy for his shoulders, his chin was squeezed against the napkin the sister had tucked round his neck, and the two black crutches, propped against the chair on either hand, seemed tall out of proportion with his hunched-up body. A stained-glass pseudo-Renaissance window lit with rainbow gleams the fluttering white wings of Sister Céline's headdress, casting wine-red stains upon the tablecloth and a soup-plate of steaming milk and tapioca.

"Come along now!" the sister wheedled, and, lifting a spoonful of the liquid, drained off the drops along the edge of the plate; then, with a cheerful "Ups-a-daisy!" as if she were coaxing a child to take his pap, she tilted the spoon between the old man's lips, and emptied it down before he had time to turn away. His fingers, splayed upon his knees, twitched with annoyance. It galled his self-respect to seem so helpless, unable to feed himself. He lunged forward to grasp the spoon the sister was holding, but his fingers, stiffened with the years and swollen now with dropsy, refused their service. The spoon slipped from his hand, clattered onto the floor. With an angry sweep of his arm he thrust them all aside—table, plate, and nurse.

"Not hungry. Won't be forced to eat!" he cried, turning towards his son, as though to call for his protection. Antoine's silence gave him heart, it seemed, for he cast a furious glance at the nurse. "Take all that mess away!" Unprotesting, the sister beat a hasty retreat out of the old man's eyeshot.

He coughed. At frequent intervals he emitted a short, dry cough which, mechanical though it was and unaccompanied by loss of breath, made him clench his fists and pucker his tightly shut eyelids.

"Let me tell you"—M. Thibault spoke with asperity, as though to voice a rankling grievance—"last night and this morning again I've been having fits of vomiting."

Antoine felt himself being stealthily observed, and assumed a detached air.

"Really?"

"That doesn't surprise you, eh?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I half expected it," Antoine rejoined smilingly. He had little trouble in playing his part. Never had he treated any other patient with such long-suffering compassion; he came every day, often twice a day, and at each visit, indefatigably—as though he were renewing the dressing on a wound—racked his brains to conjure up new arguments, logical, if insincere, and repeated in the same tone of certitude the selfsame words of comfort. "What can you expect, Father? Your digestive organs aren't what they were when you were a young man, and they've been pestered for at least eight months with drugs and medicines. We may count ourselves lucky they didn't show signs of revolt very much sooner."

M. Thibault was silent, thinking it over. Already Antoine's words had taken effect and given him new heart; moreover, it was a relief to be able to fix the blame on something or someone.

"Yes," he said, clapping his large palms noiselessly together, "those idiots with their drugs, why, they've … Ow, my leg! … Yes, they've—they've ruined my digestion. Ow!"

The twinge was so acute and sudden that for a moment his features were convulsed. He let his body slip to one side; then, resting his weight on Antoine's and the sister's arms, he managed to stretch out his leg, halting the stream of liquid fire that was shooting down the limb.

"You told me that … that Thérivier's injections would … do my sciatica good!" he shouted. "Well, now, out with the truth! Is it any better?"

"It is," said Antoine coolly.

M. Thibault cast a bewildered look at his son.

"M. Thibault himself told me that he'd been having much less pain since Tuesday last," the sister put in shrilly; she had formed a habit of pitching her voice as high as she could, to make herself heard. Seizing the auspicious moment, she slipped a spoonful of tapioca into her patient's mouth.

"Since Tuesday?" the old man spluttered, making a valiant effort to remember. Then he held his peace.

In silent distress Antoine observed the symptoms of disease upon his father's face; every mental effort loosened the muscles of his jaw and made his eyelids rise, his lashes flutter. The poor old man was only too eager to believe that he was getting better, and indeed, till now, had never doubted it. Once more, taken by surprise, he let himself be spoon-fed; then, in desperate disgust, he pushed the sister away so angrily that she thought better of it and began undoing the napkin round his neck.

"They've ru-ruined my digestion," he mumbled, as the woman wiped his chin.

No sooner had she left the room with the tray than M. Thibault, who had, it seemed, been waiting for this chance of a heart-to-heart talk with Antoine, slewed himself round and, with a confidential smile, motioned him to come and sit beside him.

"Sister Céline," he began in a tone of deep emotion, "is an excellent creature, yes, Antoine, a really saintly soul. We can never be too … too grateful to her. But there's the convent to consider, and … Oh, I know that the Mother Superior is under obligations to me. And that's just the point! I have scruples about it; I'm loath to take advantage of her devotion when there are more pressing calls, sick and suffering folk who need her help. Don't you agree?"

Forestalling Antoine's protest, he silenced him with a gesture; then, his chin thrust forward with an air of meek entreaty, he went on in phrases broken by fits of coughing.

"Needless to say, it isn't today I'm thinking of, nor yet tomorrow. But … don't you think that … that quite soon … well, as soon as I'm really on the mend … this excellent woman could be released from her duties here? You can't imagine, my dear boy, how disagreeable it is always to have someone at one's elbow. As soon as possible, then, do let's … get rid of her."

Antoine, lacking the heart to answer, made feeble gestures of approval. So that inflexible authority, against which all his youth had vainly struggled, had come to—this! In earlier days the old autocrat would have dismissed the offending nurse without a word of explanation; now he was growing weak, defenceless. At such moments his father's physical decline struck Antoine as even more apparent than when he gauged, under his fingers, the wastage of the inner organs.

"What? Are you going already?" M. Thibault murmured, seeing Antoine rise. There was a note of protest in his voice, of pleading and regret; almost of tenderness. Antoine was touched.

"I've no choice," he said with a smile. "My whole afternoon's taken up with appointments. But I'll try to look in again this evening."

He went up to his father to kiss him, a habit he had recently formed. But the old man turned away his head.

"All right then, off you go, my boy! Have it your own way!"

Antoine went out without replying.

In the hall, perched on a chair, Mademoiselle was in wait for him.

"I've got to speak to you, Antoine. It's about the sister… ."

But he could bear no more. He picked up his coat and hat, and closed the front-door behind him. On the landing he suddenly felt depressed; struggling into his overcoat, he was reminded of the jerk he used to give his shoulders in his soldiering days, to hoist the pack into position before he set out on the march again.

Out in the street the tides of traffic and the passers-by, struggling against an autumn gale, restored his spirits, and he hastened forward in quest of a taxi.

# III

"JUST twenty to," Antoine observed as the taxi passed the Madeleine clock. "Pretty close. The chief's so infernally punctual—I'll bet he's getting ready for me now!"

As Antoine surmised, Dr. Philip was standing waiting for him at the door of his consulting-room.

"Afternoon, Thibault," he rapped out. He always spoke in a curious Punch-and-Judyish staccato, with what sounded like an undertone of irony. "Exactly quarter to. Let's be off."

"Right, Chief," Antoine cheerfully assented.

Antoine welcomed every occasion that placed him once again in Dr. Philip's tutelage. For two consecutive years he had worked as his resident assistant and lived in constant intimacy with his senior. Though, after that, he had been transferred to another branch, he had never lost contact with his former teacher, and, in the years that followed, Dr. Philip, to the exclusion of all others, had remained for him the "chief." Antoine was known as "Thibault, Philip's pupil," but he was more than that; he was his senior's right-hand man, his spiritual son. Yet, often enough, his adversary, too—in the clash of youth with riper age, of adventurousness and a proclivity for taking risks, with prudence. The bond that had grown up between them during their seven years' friendship and professional co-operation was proof against all rupture. No sooner was Antoine in Philip's company than, insensibly, his personality underwent a change, dwindled, as it were, in bulk; the self-contained world-in-himself that he had been a moment before lapsed automatically into a satellite. But this circumstance, far from displeasing him, flattered his self-esteem and deepened his affection for his chief; for the professor's unquestioned eminence, coupled with his reputation for being hard to satisfy where colleagues were concerned, conferred a special value on his attachment for Antoine. Whenever master and pupil were together, good humour was the order of the day; both were convinced that the common run of mortals consisted of numskulls and incapables; they themselves were lofty exceptions to the general rule. The manner in which the chief, so reticent by habit, spoke to Antoine, his confident expansiveness, the meaning smiles and winks which accompanied certain remarks, even the terms he used—comprehensible only to a few initiates—all seemed to prove that Antoine was the only person with whom Philip could talk freely, by whom he was assured of being precisely understood. On the occasions when they disagreed, the subject of dispute was always of the same order: Antoine accused Philip of hoodwinking himself and taking the brilliant sallies of his skeptical mind for reasoned conclusions. Or, it might be, after threshing out a problem with his junior and finding their views concur, Philip would suddenly sheer off on the opposite tack and ridicule all they had just been saying: "Viewed from another angle, you know, those ideas of ours are buncombe"—which was tantamount to saying: "It's a waste of time pondering over things; one 'truth' is as true as another!" Antoine's blood boiled; he could not stomach such an attitude, and it galled him like a physical infirmity. On such occasions he would bid his chief a prompt but courteous farewell and, flinging himself into his work, redress his mental balance in a wholesome burst of energy.

On the landing they met Thérivier who had come to seek urgent counsel from the chief. Thérivier, too, had worked under Philip; an older man than Antoine, he was now a general practitioner. M. Thibault was one of his patients.

The professor halted. Slightly stooping, motionless, with dangling arms, his garments floating round his tall, slight form, he looked like a gaunt marionette dangling from its unpulled strings. The man who was addressing him, plump and stocky, fidgeting and smiling, struck a comical contrast with him. They stood in the full light of the landing window and Antoine, posted in the background, amused himself watching his chief; he always relished such sudden glimpses from an unwonted angle of people he knew well. Just now Philip was observing Thérivier with his keen, pale eyes, truculent as ever under the beetling eyebrows, which had kept their blackness despite the grey streaks in his beard—a goat's beard, almost too unsightly to be natural, and looking like an absurd fringe of straggling hair tacked onto his chin. Everything, indeed, about the man was disconcerting, not to say repellent: his general untidiness, his off-hand manner, and certain personal idiosyncrasies—a red and over-prominent nose, the hissing intake of his breath, his caustic grin and pendulous, moist lips whence a nasal drawl seemed to trickle out laboriously, rising now and then to a shrill falsetto when he let fly a shaft of satire or a scathing comment. At such moments his simian eyes twinkled behind their bushy thickets with a glint of secret exultation that asked no reciprocity.

But only novices and nonentities were estranged from Philip by their unfavourable first impression. As a matter of fact, as Antoine had observed, no other doctor was more popular with patients, no teacher more esteemed by his colleagues, more ardently sought after by the unruly youngsters training in the hospitals. His bitterest gibes were aimed at human folly, life's absurdities; and only fools resented them. None could watch him at his professional task without admiring, not merely the bright activity of a master-mind devoid of pettiness or any real scorn, but, what was more, a sensitive, warm-hearted being who was genuinely distressed by his daily intercourse with suffering. It was obvious at such moments that that acid wit of his was only Philip's way of fighting down depression, only another facet of his clear-visioned sympathy; obvious, too, that the cutting remarks which turned so many fools against him were, in the last analysis, part and parcel of his philosophy.

Antoine paid little attention to what the two doctors were saying. They were talking about one of Thérivier's patients whom the chief had visited on the previous day. A serious case, it seemed. Thérivier stuck to his guns.

"No, my boy," Philip declared, "one c.c. is the most I'd care to give. Better still, the half of that. And in two doses, if you please." And, when the younger man grew restive, obviously hostile to such half-measures, Philip, laying a moderating hand upon his shoulder, continued in a nasal drawl: "Look here, Thérivier, when a patient's come to that pass, there are just two forces fighting it out over his body: nature and disease. Up comes the doctor and deals a blow at a venture. Heads or tails. If his blow lands on the malady, it's heads. But, should he knock nature out, it's tails, and the patient's moriturus. That's how it works out, my lad. So, when a man has reached my age, he walks warily and takes care not to hit too hard." For some seconds he stood motionless, swallowing his saliva with little hissing noises. With a twinkle in his eye he was studying Thérivier's face. Then he dropped his hand and, with a humorous glance at Antoine, started to go down the stairs.

Antoine and Thérivier followed behind.

"How's your father?" Thérivier inquired.

"He's been having vomiting attacks since yesterday."

"Is that so?" Thérivier frowned and pursed his lips. After a short silence he went on: "Have you examined his legs recently?"

"No."

"They seemed a trifle more swollen the day before yesterday."

"Albumin?"

"Phlebitis setting in, more likely. I'll give him a visit between four and five. Will you be there?"

Philip's car was waiting at the door. Thérivier said goodbye and hopped briskly away. Considering what I spend in taxis nowadays, Antoine reflected, it would pay me to invest in a small car.

"Where are we going, Thibault?"

"Faubourg Saint-Honoré."

Philip, who seemed to feel the cold, crouched in a corner; before the driver slipped in the gear, he put a question to Antoine.

"Give me an outline of the case, my boy. Really hopeless, is it?"

"Quite hopeless, Chief. It's a little girl, two years old, a premature child and malformed from birth, poor little thing; hare-lip and congenital cleft palate. Hequét himself operated last spring. Functional debility of the heart as well. Got it? Right. To make things worse, there was a sudden and acute attack of otitis; it developed when she was in the country. She's their only child, by the way."

Philip, who was gazing into the distance along the transient vista of the streets, made sympathetic noises in his throat.

"Unfortunately Mme. Hequét's seven months pregnant, and it's a hard pregnancy. She doesn't take the least care of herself, I imagine; anyhow, to avoid another accident of the kind, Hequét had his wife leave Paris and stay at Maisons-Laffitte, where an aunt of hers lent them a house—as a matter of fact I know these people; they were friends of my brother. It was at Maisons that the otitis set in."

"What day?"

"We can't be sure. The nurse can't say; most likely it escaped her notice. The child's mother has to stay in bed; at first she didn't notice anything, then she put it down to toothache. Not till Saturday evening …"

"The day before yesterday?"

"Yes. Hequét went to Maisons to spend Sunday there as usual; he saw at once that the child was in danger. He arranged for an ambulance and rushed his wife and child to Paris that night. He rang me up first thing when he arrived and I saw the child early Sunday morning. I'd arranged for Lanquetot, the ear specialist, to be present. We found every possible complication: mastoiditis, of course, infection of the lateral sinus, and so on. Since yesterday we've tried all sorts of treatments, but none of them helped. She's going from bad to worse. This morning there were meningeal symptoms."

"Operation?"

"Impossible, so it seems. Pechot, whom Hequét called in last night, was firm on the point; the heart condition rules out an operation. And we can't do anything to allay the pain—it's terrible—except applying ice."

Philip, his eyes still fixed on some far-off point, grunted again.

"Well, that's how things are," Antoine concluded in an anxious voice. "Now it's up to you, Chief." After a pause he added: "Personally, I confess, my only hope is that we've come too late and—all is over."

"Hequét has no illusions about it, eh?"

"None."

Philip was silent for a moment; then he laid his hand on Antoine's arm.

"Don't you be so sure about it, Thibault. As a doctor, of course, poor Hequét must *know* there's no hope left. But, as a father … The worse things are, the more a man's inclined to throw dust in his own eyes." A disillusioned smile flickered on his face as he added in a high-pitched drawl: "And it's just as well, isn't it? Just as well."

# IV

HÉUQUET'S flat was on the third floor. The front-door opened at the sound of the ascending elevator; they were expected. A fat man in a white coat, with a black beard that emphasized his Semitic cast of features, shook Antoine's hand. Antoine introduced him.

"Isaac Studler."

Studler had once been a medical student and, though he had given up medicine, was a familiar figure in medical circles. On Hequét, a former fellow-student, he lavished a blind affection, a dog-like devotion. A telephone-call had apprised him of his friend's abrupt return and, cancelling all engagements, he had hastened to the sick child's bedside.

All the doors stood open and the flat had a lugubrious aspect; things had been left just as they were when it was vacated in the spring. There were no curtains up, the blinds were drawn and lamps lit everywhere, Under the garish light the pyramids of furniture stacked in the middle of each room and covered with white sheets looked like so many children's catafalques. The floor of the study where Studler left the two doctors when he went to summon Hequét was strewn with a medley of objects, scattered round a partly unpacked trunk.

A door was flung open and a half-dressed young woman burst in, her face convulsed with grief and her bright golden hair disordered. She hastened towards them as quickly as her cumbered gait permitted, one hand steadying her abdomen, the other holding up her dressing-gown so as not to trip over it. Her breath came in gasps and she could not speak; her lips were quivering. She went straight up to Philip and gazed at him with tear-dimmed eyes and a look of silent entreaty so heartrending that he did not think of greeting her but held out both hands towards her in an instinctive gesture of reassurance and profound sympathy.

Hequét entered suddenly from the hall.

"Nicole!"

His voice shook with indignation. Pale, his features twitching, he sprang towards his wife and, paying no heed to Philip, caught her up and swung her off her feet into his arms with an access of energy that took the others by surprise. Sobbing, she offered no resistance.

"Open the door!" he gasped, turning towards Antoine, who darted forward to his aid.

Antoine went with them, supporting Nicole's drooping head. A desolate lament broke from her lips and Antoine caught the broken phrases. "You'll never forgive me. I'm to blame for everything, everything. It's my fault she was born a cripple. You've been angry with me so long! Now it's my fault again. If only I'd understood, if I'd looked after her at once …!" As they entered the bedroom Antoine caught sight of a large, gaping bed, and it struck him she had been listening for the doctors' coming and risen in haste despite her husband's orders.

Seizing Antoine's hand, she clung to it with the frenzy of despair.

"I beg you, doctor … Felix would never forgive me. I'd lose all hope of being forgiven, if … Try everything you possibly can. Oh, I implore you, doctor, save her!"

Her husband had gently laid her in the bed and was drawing back the quilt. She let go Antoine's hand and ceased speaking.

Hequét stooped over her and Antoine caught the expression in the eyes of each: in hers a look of forlorn hopelessness; in his, exasperation.

"I forbid you to get up, do you hear?"

She shut her eyes. Bending more closely over her, he touched her hair with his lips, then pressed a kiss on her closed eyelids that seemed to seal a pact between them, almost as if he promised her his pardon, come what might. Then he led Antoine from the room.

Studler had taken the chief to the child's bedside and when they joined him there Philip had already taken off his coat and put on a white apron. Calmly, impassively, as though he and the child inhabited a world apart, he was proceeding with a minute, methodical examination of his patient, though he had realized from the first that nothing could be done to save her.

Hequét's eyes were fixed on his face; his hands were trembling and he did not speak.

The examination lasted ten minutes.

When it was ended Philip raised his head and turned his eyes on Hequét. Hequét had changed out of recognition; his face was sombre, and between the eyelids, red and shrivelled as though a dusty wind had parched them up, his eyes were deathly still—a frozen calm that masked the inner tragedy. From the quick glance he cast at Hequét, Philip knew there was no need to beat about the bush and said nothing of the treatment which, out of pity, he had intended to prescribe. He took off the apron and quickly washed his hands. The nurse handed him his coat, he put it on, and, without another glance at the little bed, went out of the room. Hequét, then Antoine, followed him.

Standing in the hall, the three men gazed at each other.

"Anyhow, it was very kind of you to come," Hequét murmured.

Philip gave a slight shrug and his lips smacked with a little watery hiss. Focused on his across the glasses, Hequét's eyes grew hard, then scornful, almost malevolent; but all at once their angry light died out and he stammered in an apologetic voice:

"Somehow, one can't help hoping for the impossible."

Philip made a vague, ambiguous gesture and placidly reached for his hat. But, instead of opening the door, he turned back to Hequét and, after a brief hesitation, laid his hand awkwardly on Hequét's arm. There was another silence; then Philip seemed to collect himself, gave a slight cough, and at last went out.

Antoine went up to Hequét.

"It's my consulting-day, but I'll look in tonight, at about nine."

Hequét stood stock-still, staring blindly towards the open door through which, with Philip's going, his last hope had vanished; he moved his head to show that he had understood.

Followed by Antoine, Philip went quickly down the two flights of stairs without speaking. Suddenly he halted, sucked back his saliva with a little hissing sound, like the lisp of running water, and, when he spoke, his drawl seemed more pronounced than ever.

"I suppose it was up to me to prescribe something, eh? *Ut aliquid fieri videatur*. But, upon my word, I didn't dare." He went down a few steps in silence, then muttered, without looking towards Antoine:

"Personally I'm not so optimistic as you are. It may well drag on for another day or two."

When they came to the foot of the staircase, they met two ladies who were just entering.

"M. Thibault!"

Antoine recognized Mme. de Fontanin.

"Well?" she asked in a level voice from which she studiously excluded any sound of apprehension. "We are just on our way to make inquiries."

Antoine's only response was a slow movement of his head from side to side.

"No, no! Can one ever be sure?" Mme. de Fontanin exclaimed with a shade of reprobation, as though Antoine's demeanour constrained her to avert, as quickly as she could, an evil omen. "Let's have confidence, doctor, confidence! No, *that's* out of the question, it would be too horrible! Don't you think so, Jenny?"

Only then did Antoine notice the girl standing in the background. He made haste to apologize. She seemed ill at ease, irresolute; at last she held out her hand to him. Antoine saw her look of utter dejection, the nervous flutter of her eyelids, but, knowing Jenny's affection for her cousin Nicole, was not surprised.

Yet he could not help murmuring to himself, as he followed up the chief: "How changed she is!" And memory lit up a picture of the past, already so remote: a summer evening in a garden, a young girl in a light, bright dress. The chance encounter stirred the embers of a latent grief. "Poor old Jacques!" he thought. "He wouldn't have recognized her, that's sure."

Philip was crouching morosely in a corner of his car.

"I'm off to the School of Medicine," he said. "I can drop you at your place."

He did not utter three words all the way. Only when they were at the corner of the Rue de l'Université and Antoine was about to say goodbye did he seem to shake off his lethargy.

"By the way, Thibault, you've specialized a bit in cases of defective speech. I sent someone to you the other day, a Mme. Ernst."

"I've an appointment with her today."

"She will bring her little boy; he's five or six years old, but talks in monosyllables, like a baby. What's more, there are some sounds he seems unable to form at all. But, if you ask him to say his prayers, he goes on his knees and rattles off 'Our Father' from beginning to end, and articulates almost perfectly. Seems an intelligent child, too. You'll find it quite an interesting case, I imagine."

# V

LÉON came forward as soon as he heard his master's key turn in the lock.

"Mile, de Battaincourt has come." Then, with his usual air of diffidence, he volunteered the information: "There's a governess, I think, come with her."

"She's not a Battaincourt, really," Antoine amended, *sotto voce*. "She's Goupillot's daughter—Goupillot of 'Goupillot's Stores.' "

He stepped into the bedroom to change his coat and collar, for he set store by his appearance and dressed with sedulous good taste. Then he went to the consulting-room, glanced round to see that all was spick and span, and, exhilarated by the prospect of the strenuous afternoon before him, briskly drew aside a curtain and opened the door of the waiting-room.

A slim young woman rose when he entered. (He recognized her as an English girl who had accompanied Mme. de Battaincourt and her daughter in the previous spring, and at once a freak of memory brought back to him a little detail which had struck him at the time. When the visit had ended, as he was writing out the prescription at his desk, he had chanced to look up and his eyes fell on Mme. de Battaincourt. She and the English governess, in summery frocks, were standing close together at the bay-window and he had caught a curious gleam—it haunted his memory yet—in the fair Anne's eyes as she stroked back into place a vagrant lock on the younger woman's smooth, fair forehead, with fondling, gloveless fingers.)

The English girl, with a casual nod for Antoine, motioned to the child to enter first. As Antoine drew aside to let them pass, the subtle fragrance of two young, delicately nurtured bodies was wafted towards him. Both girls had fair hair and glowing cheeks, were tall and slim.

Huguette was carrying her coat slung over her arm; though barely thirteen, she was so tall that it came as a surprise to see her in so juvenile a frock; short and sleeveless, it showed to full advantage her childish skin, gloriously burnished by the summer sun. Her hair, a rich, warm gold, tumbled in wanton ringlets round her cheeks; its look of youthful gaiety was oddly out of keeping with the listless eyes that gave an impression of profound melancholy, and her nervous smile.

The English girl turned to Antoine. The bloom on her cheeks grew rosier still as she set about explaining in her French, melodious as bird-song, that her employer was lunching out, had asked her to be sure and send back the car, and would be coming presently.

Antoine had gone up to Huguette and, tapping her lightly on the shoulder, made her turn towards the light.

"And how do we feel today?" he inquired vaguely.

Huguette's only answer was a wan smile and a shake of the head.

Meanwhile Antoine was summarily examining the coloration of lips and gums, and of the conjunctivae; but his deeper thoughts had taken another trend. Just now in the waiting-room he had noticed the awkward way in which the girl, for all the natural grace which obviously was hers, had risen from the chair, and a hint of stiffness in her walk as she approached him. After that, too, when he had tapped her on the shoulder, a slight wince and an almost imperceptible grimace had not escaped his vigilant attention.

This was only his second time of seeing the child; he was not the family doctor. It was no doubt Simon de Battaincourt, an old friend of Jacques, who had persuaded his wife to pay a surprise visit to Antoine during the spring, and take his opinion on the general health of her daughter, who, she said, had outgrown her strength. On that occasion Antoine had not discovered any trace of lesion, though her general condition had impressed him unfavourably. He had prescribed a strict regimen and told the mother to bring the child to see him every month. She had never come again.

"Now will you take your things off, please?" he said.

Huguette turned to the governess.

"Please come, Miss Mary."

Seated at his desk, Antoine read through the diagnosis he had made in June, with studied impassivity. Though so far he had failed to detect any definite symptom, he had his suspicions. Often enough such first impressions had led him to put his finger on diseases still in the latent state; nevertheless, he refused on principle to accept their verdict over-hastily. He spread out on the table the X-ray photograph that had been taken in the spring and examined it carefully. Then he rose.

Perched on the arm of a chair in the middle of the room, Huguette was indolently letting herself be undressed. Whenever she tried to help her governess to undo a ribbon or a hook, she set about it so clumsily that the Englishwoman pushed her hand aside. At one moment her irritation was so great that she rapped the child smartly over the knuckles. The fretful gesture and a hint of sullenness that flawed the madonna-like purity of Mary's features convinced Antoine that the pretty governess had little liking for the child. Moreover, Huguette seemed afraid of her.

"Thanks, that will do," he said, going up to the girl.

The young girl raised her eyes to his—beautiful blue eyes, clear and luminous, for, though she could not say why, she had taken a liking to this "big doctor-man." (Indeed, for all his opinionated air and the unrelaxing tension of his features, Antoine seldom gave his patients the impression of being really stern. Even the youngest and least observant were rarely led astray; the line across his forehead, his deep-set, insistent eyes, his strong jaw and firmly cut mouth impressed them, rather, as the outward signs of forcefulness and wisdom. "The only thing patients really want," the chief had once remarked with a sardonic grin, "is—to be taken seriously.")

Antoine began by a systematic examination. The lungs: nothing wrong there. Like Philip, he proceeded step by step. The heart's in order, too. But, "Pott's disease," something was whispering in his ear. "What about Pott's disease?"

"Bend forward," he suddenly commanded. "No, wait a bit! Pick something up—your shoe, for instance."

To avoid flexing her back, she bent her knees. A bad sign, that. He still hoped he was wrong, but the thing was to make certain.

"Hold yourself straight. Cross your arms. Like that. Now lean forward, please. Bend … more than that!"

As she straightened herself again, her lips slowly parted, with a languid grace, and smiled towards him coaxingly.

"That hurt!" Her voice was soft, apologetic.

"Right!" said Antoine. He considered her a moment covertly. Then he met her eyes and smiled. She was a quaint little thing, desirable too, as she stood there in her young nakedness, with her shoe in her hand and the wondering, tender gaze of her big eyes fixed on Antoine. She had already grown tired of standing up and was leaning now on the back of a chair. The mellow glow of a ripe apricot coloured her shoulders, her arms, her rounded thighs, and made them look almost dark in contrast with the gleaming whiteness of her torso.

"Lie down there!" he told her, spreading a sheet upon the couch. Once more a feeling of deep concern had mastered him, and the smile died from his face. "Lie on your face. Quite flat, please."

The decisive moment had come. Antoine knelt down, resting the weight of his body on his heels, and thrust his arms out to free his wrists from the cuffs. For a couple of seconds he seemed lost in thought and did not move; his brooding eyes roamed over the firm, muscular skin of the back from the shoulder-blades to the shadowed flexure of the loins. Then, placing his hand on the warm neck that flinched a little under its touch, he laid two exploring fingertips upon the spinal column, and, palpating each segment with an even pressure, told one by one the beads of living tissue, like a rosary… . Suddenly the child's body twitched, winced from his touch, and Antoine hastily withdrew his hand. A laughing, but emphatic voice, half stifled in the cushions, protested.

"Now you're hurting me, doctor!"

"Really? Where exactly?" To divert her attention, he touched some other parts of her skin.

"Here?"

"No."

"And here?"

"No."

Then, to make assurance the more sure, he briskly tapped the affected vertebra with his forefinger.

"And here?"

The girl uttered a little cry that quickly changed to a forced laugh.

There was a silence.

"Turn over, please," said Antoine with a fresh, unwonted gentleness in his voice.

He ran his fingers over her neck, her chest and arm-pits. Huguette braced herself up, determined not to cry out again. But, when he pressed the groin-glands, she could not keep back a little moan of pain.

Antoine stood up; his face was impassive, but he eluded the child's inquiring eyes.

"Well, I'm through with you!" he grumbled, making believe he was scolding her. "I never saw such a cry-baby!"

There was a knock at the door. Before the girl could answer, it swung open and the fair Anne made a tempestuous entrance.

"Here I am, doctor!" There was a warm resonance in her voice. "You must forgive me for being so shockingly late. But really, doctor, you live at the back of beyond!" She laughed. "Anyhow, I hope you didn't wait for me," she added, eyeing her daughter. "Mind you don't catch cold!" There was no tenderness in her tone. Then a sudden change came over her voice; losing its overtone of harshness, it sank to a deep, sensuous contralto. "Mary dear, will you be very sweet and put something round her shoulders?"

She moved towards Antoine. There was a frank appeal in her lithe body, but beneath her lively gestures there lay a vein of hardness, a ruthless obstinacy, mellowed and disciplined though it was by years of practice in the game of seduction, with femininity as her trump-card. A pungent perfume, too heavy, as it seemed, to rise, hung about her. With an airy gesture she held out a white-gloved hand, tinkling with bangles.

"How do you do?"

Greyly her eyes bored into Antoine's. On her temples, below the waved brown hair, an imperceptible tracery of tiny lines gave the skin round her eyelids a look of great fragility. He turned away his eyes.

"Well, doctor, are you satisfied?" she asked. "How far have you got with your examination?"

"As a matter of fact it's just over for today," Antoine replied with a constrained smile; then he turned to the English girl. "You can dress her now."

"Anyhow, you can't deny she's ever so much better," Mme. de Battaincourt gaily exclaimed, seating herself, as was her habit, with her back to the light. "Did she tell you that we spent …"

Antoine, who had gone to the basin, turned his head politely in her direction, as he began to wash his hands.

"… two months at Ostende, and all on her account? You can see the effects; brown as a berry, isn't she? But you should have seen her six weeks ago! Shouldn't he, Mary?"

Antoine was thinking things out. Doubt was no longer possible about the presence of tuberculosis; it was undermining the foundations of the child's body and already deeply rooted in the spine. He tried to persuade himself that the lesions were curable, but he did not really think so. Despite appearances, her general condition was alarming. The whole glandular system was inflamed. Huguette was old Goupillot's daughter and the shadow of an evil heredity menaced her future, even her life.

"Did she tell you she got the third prize in the sun-tan contest at the Palace Hotel? And a consolation prize at the Casino?"

She had a very slight lisp, just enough to lend a reassuring touch of childishness to her rather formidable charms. The grey eyes seemed curiously out of place in her dark complexion and at times, for no apparent reason, a rapid, disconcerting gleam would flash out from their pupils. She had taken a vague dislike to Antoine at first sight. Anne de Battaincourt liked to feel she exercised a physical attraction on men and women and, though with the years she turned it less often to account, the more her pleasure in it tended to remain platonic, the greater seemed her eagerness to be assured on every possible occasion of her sensual charm. Antoine's attitude vexed her, just because the attentive, if slightly quizzing, way in which he looked at her showed he was not wholly insensitive to her appeal; yet, as she saw only too well, he had not the slightest difficulty in controlling his feelings, and would remain coolly critical in every circumstance.

"You must excuse me," she remarked with a low-pitched laugh, "but I'm simply stifling in this coat." Remaining seated in the chair and keeping her eyes fixed on the young man, with a lithe movement that set her trinkets jingling, she slipped out of her furs and let them sink onto the seat behind her. Her bosom heaved more freely, and the opening of her blouse revealed a willowy neck, almost a young girl's neck, that had a quaintly authoritative air—so proudly did it flaunt the little helmeted head with the clean-cut, hawk-like profile.

Leaning forward to dry his hands, Antoine listened to her with half an ear; he was moodily picturing to himself the progressive inflammation of the bony structures, the gradual softening and ultimate collapse of the carious spine. There was just one chance of saving her, and it must be tried at once. She must be immobilized in a plaster cast for months, perhaps for years; a living death!

"We had a very gay season at Ostende last summer," Mme. de Battaincourt went on, raising her voice so as to compel Antoine's attention. "The place was simply packed—rather too much so for my liking. A regular omnium gatherum!" She laughed. Then, seeing she could not catch the doctor's ear, she gradually lowered her voice and ceased speaking, casting an approving glance at Mary, who was helping Huguette into her frock. But she could not bear to play the part of a mere onlooker for long; somehow she had to make her presence felt. Rising abruptly, she smoothed out a crease in Huguette's collar and settled her blouse with an emphatic little tug. Then, bending familiarly towards the English girl, she began to talk to her in undertones.

"You know, Mary, I like that chemisette from Hudson's much better; we must get Suzy to copy it. Stand up!" she angrily addressed her daughter. "Always sitting down! How are we to know if you've got your dress on straight?" Then with a sinuous movement of her body she turned to Antoine. "You can't imagine, doctor, what a lazybones she is, this great gawk of a girl of mine. It's maddening for anyone like me who wants to be always up and about."

Antoine's eyes met Huguette's look of vague interrogation and he could not withhold a little conspiratorial twinkle, which started the child smiling too.

"Let's see" —he hastily thought out a programme— "it's Monday today. She must be put in plaster by Friday or Saturday. After that, we'll see."

After that? As he stood there, lost in thought, a picture formed before his eyes: the terrace of a sanatorium at Berck-sur-Mer and, in the row of beds like open coffins tilted towards the sea-breeze, one bed, a trifle longer than its neighbours, and, prone on the pillowless mattress, the cripple's upturned face, blue eyes roaming the low horizon of the dunes.

Meanwhile Mme. de Battaincourt continued airing her grievances against her daughter's laziness.

"Just imagine! When we were at Ostende there was a dancing-class each morning at the Casino and of course I took her there. Well, after each dance, our young lady used to collapse onto the sofa and start whimpering, trying to look interesting, I suppose." She shrugged her shoulders. "Personally, I loathe the pathetic touch!" Such was her vehemence, and so ruthless the steely look she flashed at Antoine, that he suddenly remembered certain rumours he once had heard—that Goupillot, turned jealous in old age, had conveniently succumbed to poison. There was a vicious edge to her voice as she added: "In fact she made herself so ridiculous that I had to let her have her way."

Antoine gave her an unamiable look. He had come to a swift decision. Any serious conversation with this woman was out of the question; he would get rid of her at once and send an urgent summons to her husband. True, Huguette was not Battaincourt's daughter, but Antoine remembered Jacques's description of the man: "Deficient in grey matter, but a heart of gold."

"Is your husband in Paris?" he asked.

At last, thought Mme. de Battaincourt, he means the interview to take a more sociable turn. About time, too! She had a favour to ask of Antoine and, to that end, wanted to be in his good books. She burst out laughing and called the English girl to witness.

"Did you hear what he said, Mary? No, my dear doctor, there's no escaping Touraine till February—the shooting keeps us there. It was all I could do to get away this week, between two house-parties. On Saturday I'm expecting another houseful."

Antoine made no comment; his silence gave the final touch to her vexation. Really there was nothing to be done with such a boor! How ridiculous he looked with that absent-minded air of his; ill-mannered, too!

She crossed the room to get her coat.

"Yes," Antoine was saying to himself. "I'll wire to Battaincourt at once; I've got his address… . He'll be in Paris tomorrow or the day after at the latest. X-ray examination on Thursday. And, to make sure, a consultation with the chief. We'll have her in plaster by Saturday."

Huguette, seated in a chair, was demurely putting on her gloves while her mother, resplendent in a vast fur-coat, settled her little casque of golden pheasant's plumage, shaped like a Valkyrie's helmet. There was an undertone of rancour in her voice when she spoke again.

"Well, doctor, what about it? So there's no prescription? What's your advice for her this time? Anyhow, I suppose you won't say no to her attending some meets with Mary, in the dog-cart? …"

# VI

AFTER seeing Mme. de Battaincourt off, Antoine returned to the consulting-room and once again opened the curtained door. Rumelles entered with the brisk alacrity of a man who has never a minute to spare.

"I fear I kept you waiting," Antoine suggested politely.

With an urbane gesture the visitor waved the apology aside and cordially held out his hand, as though to imply: "Here I am merely one of the common herd of patients."

"Hallo!" Antoine exclaimed quizzingly. "You look as if you'd just been visiting the President of the Republic, to say the least!"

Rumelles gave a self-satisfied laugh. He was wearing a silk-lined frock-coat and there was a top-hat in his hand. A well-set-up man, he carried the habit of officialdom with no mean success.

"Not quite that, my dear fellow. But I've just been at the Servian Embassy, where there was a luncheon in honour of the Janilozsky mission, who are visiting Paris this week. And I shall be on duty again presently; the minister has deputed me to receive Queen Elisabeth, who has had the lamentable notion of announcing that she will visit the Chrysanthemum Show at five-thirty. Luckily I know her; she's quite simple, really, a delightful woman. She adores flowers as much as she detests ceremony, so I shall confine myself to a few quite informal words of welcome."

He smiled to himself, and it struck Antoine that he was thinking out a neat conclusion for his speech, something gallant and respectful, with a spice of wit in it.

Rumelles was a man in the early forties, with a lion's mane of shaggy, yellowish hair brushed back from his temples, the rather heavy features of a Roman emperor, a truculent, upcurled moustache, and clear blue eyes on which he studiously imposed a keen, alert expression. "But for the moustache," Antoine sometimes reflected, "our lion would have the profile of a sheep."

"And what a lunch it was, my dear fellow!" He paused, his eyes half closed, wagging his head in feigned dismay. "Twenty or twenty-five of us sat down to table, functionaries and front-rankers all; yet, with the best of good will, you couldn't point to more than two or three intelligent men amongst them. Shocking, isn't it? Still, I fancy I made rather a useful move. Happily the minister has no idea of it; whenever he gets onto anything, he's like a dog with a bone, and he'd be sure to botch it." His emphatic delivery and the subtle smile which rounded off his simplest phrases gave a distinct, if uniform, incisiveness to all he said.

"Excuse me a moment." Antoine went to his desk. "I've an urgent telegram to write… . But I'm listening just the same. How are you feeling after your Servian beanfeast?"

But Rumelles, seeming to ignore the question, continued beating the air with words. Once he starts speechifying, thought Antoine, you'd never think him pressed for time. As he scribbled the telegram to Battaincourt, some scattered phrases caught his inattentive ear.

"Now that Germany is on the war-path … The Leipzig demonstrations at the unveiling of the memorial … They jump at any pretext … The hundredth anniversary of 1813 … It's coming, my dear fellow, it's coming like a house on fire. Just wait another two or three years, and you'll see!"

"What's coming?" Antoine asked, looking up with an amused glance at Rumelles. "A war, do you mean?"

"Yes, war." Rumelles's voice was earnest. "We're heading straight for it."

He had always had a harmless mania for predicting an impending European war. It sometimes looked as if he positively banked on it— a view which his next words bore out. "And that will be the moment for a man to show the stuff he's made of." An ambiguous remark, which might have meant: "to go on active service," but Antoine had no doubt about his meaning: "to scramble into power."

Rumelles, going up to the desk, leaned towards Antoine and instinctively lowered his voice.

"You've been following what's going on in Austria?"

"Well … yes—like anyone else who's not in the know."

"Tisza is putting himself forward as Berchtold's successor. Well, I had a close-up view of Tisza in 1910—he's the deadliest of fire-eaters; he made that clear enough when he was President of the Hungarian Chamber. Did you read that speech of his in which he addressed an open threat to Russia?"

Antoine had finished writing and had risen from his chair.

"No," he replied. "But ever since I've been old enough to read the papers, I've always seen Austria referred to as the danger-spot of Europe. Still, so far, that hasn't led to much harm."

"Because Germany was putting the brake on. But just at present, owing to the change which has come over Germany in the past month or so, the Austrian attitude is becoming definitely alarming. And of that change the general public has not the least idea."

"Tell me about it." Antoine could not repress his interest.

Rumelles glanced at the clock, then drew himself erect.

"I need hardly tell you that, in spite of the ostensible alliance and the fine speeches of the two emperors, relations between Germany and Austria during the last six or seven years-"

"Well," Antoine broke in, "and if they're strained, doesn't that mean a guarantee of peace, so far as we're concerned?"

"The best of guarantees. Indeed it *was* the only one."

" '*Was*,' you say. Then …?"

"All that, my dear fellow, has gone to pot." He looked at Antoine and, as though he were wondering how far he dare commit himself, muttered between his teeth: "And it's our fault, perhaps."

"Our fault?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. But that's another story. Supposing I were to tell you that the most clear-sighted people in Europe are convinced that we have bellicose projects at the back of our minds?"

"We? What nonsense!"

"The Frenchman doesn't travel. The Frenchman, my dear fellow, has no conception how his flag-waving propensities may strike outsiders. Anyhow, the understanding which has been growing up between France, England, and Russia, their latest military pacts, all the diplomatic wire-pulling that has been going on for the last two years, are, righ'tly or wrongly, beginning seriously to alarm Berlin. Confronted with what she describes in quite good faith as the 'menace' of the Triple Entente powers, Germany is waking up to the possibility that she may find herself isolated. She knows that Italy is only in theory a member of the Triple Alliance. So she has only Austria to fall back on, and that is why in the last few weeks Germany has made it her business to tighten up the bond of amity between them. What was the price she paid—was it the offer of important concessions, or a deviation from her former line of policy? You catch the point? From that to a quick reshuffle of the cards, an acquiescence in, not to say the active championship of, Austria's Balkan policy, it was only a step; and, so they say, that step has been taken. What makes it all the more serious is that Austria, seeing how the wind lies, has seized the occasion, as you have observed, to force the pace. So now we have Germany deliberately backing the wildcat ambitions of the Austrians, and heaven alone knows where those ambitions, backed by Germany, may land us at any moment! It can only mean that Europe will be drawn, drawn ineluctably, into the Balkan imbroglio. Now do you see why one can't help being pessimistic, or, at the least, uneasy, if one is even a little in the know?"

Antoine maintained a sceptical silence. He knew from experience that experts in foreign politics have a way of predicting "inevitable" wars. He had rung for Léon and, standing near the door, waited for him to appear; after that, he would divert his visitor's attention to serious topics. Meanwhile he watched Rumelles with an uncharitable eye as he paced to and fro before the fireplace, oblivious of the time, all for his verbiage, and obviously delighted with himself.

The late Senator Rumelles, his father, had been a friend of M. Thibault, and had died just in time to miss his son's elevation to high official rank. Antoine had come across the younger Rumelles now and then in the past, but till a week ago had not seen much of him. His opinion of the man, never a favourable one, had gained in definition with each visit. He had observed that Rumelles's incessant flow of talk, his premature adoption of a statesman-like urbanity, and his interest in world-problems always disclosed, sooner or later, a streak of meanness, a crude concern with personal advancement. Indeed, ambition seemed the only strong emotion known to Rumelles, an ambition aiming somewhat higher than his mental equipment (Antoine thought little of it) warranted. He was far from being well educated, timid though by no means modest, and unstable as water; but these defects were artfully concealed under the semblance of a "rising man."

Meanwhile Léon had come and gone. "That's enough of politics— and psychology," Antoine said to himself, and stemmed the spate of words.

"Well, then? No improvement?"

Rumelles's face fell.

One evening during the previous week—it was nearly nine o'clock—Rumelles had entered Antoine's consulting-room, white with emotion. Two days previously he had discovered that he was suffering from a disease which he dared not disclose to his family doctor, still less to a total stranger. "You see, my dear fellow," he explained, "I'm a married man, and something of a public figure too; for both these reasons I can't afford to fall into the hands of a babbler, or a blackmailer." He had remembered that old Thibault's son was a doctor, and now begged Antoine to treat his case. After trying without success to induce him to consult a specialist, Antoine had consented; he was always ready to practise his art, and curious to see what kind of man this politician was.

"Really no improvement at all?"

Rumelles's only answer was a tragic shake of the head. For all his loquacity he could not bring himself to talk about his ailment, or admit that at times he endured the tortures of the damned, and that just now, after the official lunch, he had been obliged to break off an important conversation and beat a hasty retreat from the smoking-room, so violent had been the spasms of pain.

Antoine thought it over.

"Then," he announced in a firm voice, "we shall have to try the silver nitrate treatment."

He opened the "surgery" door for Rumelles, whose flow of words had quite dried up, to enter. Then, turning his back on him, he prepared the solution and charged a syringe with cocaine. When he returned, his victim had doffed the ceremonial frock-coat; collarless and trouserless, he looked like any poor afflicted mortal—-a suffering, uneasy, shamefaced man, removing his soiled underlinen with awkward gestures.

But he would not own himself beaten yet. When Antoine came up he raised his head a little and forced his lips into a would-be casual smile. He suffered none the less, and in a myriad ways. Even his spiritual loneliness was preying on his mind. For, in his present plight, it was an added tragedy that he could never wholly lay aside the mask, could not impart to anyone his loathing for this grotesque misadventure, which galled not only his body, but his pride. For—in whom could he confide? Not in a friend, for he had none. For ten years his political career had forced him to lead a life apart, behind a barrage of feigned and dubious good-fellowship. He had not a single genuine affection to fall back on. Yes, there was one: his wife's. She was, in fact, his only friend, the one person in the world who knew and loved him for what he really was, the only being to whom he could have unburdened his heart—and she, she was the one person in the world from whom, above all and at all costs, he must conceal this damnable mishap!

A stab of physical pain cut across his musings; the nitrate was beginning to take effect. Rumelles stifled his first cries of agony, but presently, despite the action of the sedative, he clenched his fists and teeth in vain, and could restrain himself no longer. Deep in his body coursed a stream of liquid fire, and he groaned like a woman in labour, while big tears rose and glistened in his blue eyes.

Antoine felt sorry for him.

"Bear up, old man; it's over now. Painful, of course, but there was nothing else for it and it won't last. Keep quite still; I'll give you some more cocaine."

But Rumelles was not listening. Stretched out on the table under the harsh light, he was jerking his legs spasmodically, like a frog on the dissecting-table.

At last Antoine managed to bring down the pain.

"It's a quarter past," he said. "When have you to be off?"

"Not … not till … till five o'clock," his victim stammered. "I've my car … wait—waiting."

Antoine bade him take heart with a good-natured smile, but there was a touch of irony behind it; he could not help picturing the dapper chauffeur with his tricolour cockade awaiting, statue-like upon his seat, His Excellency's delegate. And then—at this very moment, perhaps, they were unfurling under the marquee of the Flower Show the roll of carpet along which, only an hour hence, friend Rumelles, who now lay there wriggling and writhing like a new-born babe, would advance in solitary state with measured steps, resplendent in his frock-coat, his cat-like moustache uptilted in a smile, to greet the little queen. But, on the instant, the vision faded; now under the doctor's eyes there lay merely a patient—less than that, a "case"; less still, a chemical process, the action of a caustic on a mucous membrane, an action which he had deliberately provoked, for which he was responsible, and whose latent but inevitable operation he was now observing with his mind's eye.

Léon's three discreet taps on the door deflected his attention to the outside world. "Gise has come," he said to himself as he slapped his instruments into the tray of the sterilizer. Eager though he was to see the last of Rumelles, it was against his principles to palter with the duties of his calling, and he waited patiently till the painful effects of the nitrate had eased off.

"Make yourself at home and rest a bit," he said as he went out. "I shan't be needing this room. I'll come and tell you when it's ten to the hour."

# VII

"WILL you be so good as to wait there, Miss?" Léon had said to to Gise.

By "there" he meant Jacques's old room, which now was darkening with the nightfall, sombre and silent as a crypt. Her heart-beats quickened as she crossed the threshold and the effort she had to make to master her distress took, as usual, the form of a prayer, a brief appeal to Him who never leaves His children unconsoled. Instinctively she went towards the bed-sofa where, at so many different periods of her life, she had sat and talked the happy hours away with "Jacquot." Gise could hear—was it in the street or in the waiting-room?—a child's tempestuous sobs. She always found it difficult to control her feelings. Nowadays, for nothing at all, her eyes would brim with tears. A good thing she was alone just now. Yes, she would have to see a doctor. Not Antoine, however. She was out of sorts, losing weight—her insomnia, most likely. Anyhow it wasn't normal for a girl of nineteen… . For a minute or two she let her mind dwell on the curious sequence of those nineteen years, her never-ending childhood passed in the company of two old people; then—in her sixteenth year—heavy with cruel mystery, the blow had fallen!

Léon came in and turned on the light; Gise did not dare to tell him she would rather have been left in semi-darkness. Now, under the lamplight, she knew each object in the room for a familiar friend. Obviously enough, out of devotion to his brother's memory, Antoine had made a point of not disturbing anything; and yet, by slow degrees, once he had started using the room for meals, each object had been shifted from its place or changed its function till everything looked different—the table, for instance, planted with its leaves outspread plumb in the middle of the room, and the tea-service lording it on the disused desk between the bread-basket and a bowl of fruit. Even the bookcase… . Yes, those green curtains behind the glazed doors used not to be like that. One of them was gaping a little and, when Gise stooped to look at it, she caught the glint of glass and silver. Léon had piled up all the books on the top shelf. If poor Jacques could have seen his bookcase transformed into a sideboard …!

Jacques! Gise refused to think of him in terms of death; not merely would it not have startled her in the least, suddenly to see him standing there on the threshold, but she was always expecting him to reappear at any moment. And for the past three years her fanatic expectancy had kept her in a daydream, ecstatic—yet depressing.

Here, in these familiar surroundings, phantoms of the past flocked round her. She could not move and hardly dared to breathe, lest the faint movement of the air should desecrate the silence. There was a photograph of Antoine on the mantelpiece and, as her eyes fell on it, she remembered the day when Antoine had given that copy to Jacques; he had presented Mademoiselle with another like it, which she still had upstairs. It brought back to her an Antoine of earlier days, the Antoine who had been her stand-by in the three dark years that followed. How often since Jacques had left them had she come downstairs to talk to him about the fugitive, how often all but shared with him her secret! But now—everything had changed. Why? What had come between them? She could not fix on anything definite; the only thing she could recall was that brief scene last June, just before she left for London. The imminence of her departure, of whose secret motive he had no inkling, had seemed to throw him off his balance. What exactly had he said to her? She had gathered that his love for her was no longer a mere elder-brotherly regard, but he felt towards her in "quite another way." Surely she was mistaken, she must have dreamt it! Yet, no; even the letters he had written to her—how puzzling they had seemed, too tenderly effusive and, for all that, so reticent!—no longer conveyed the tranquil affection of former years. And so, ever since her return to France, she had instinctively kept out of his way, and during the past fortnight avoided being alone with him at any moment. And now today—what did he want of her?

She started at a sound; rapid yet measured footsteps: Antoine's steps. He entered the room and stood before her, smiling. He looked rather tired, but his brow was calm, his eyes were gay and sparkling. Gise, who had been feeling herself adrift, pulled herself together at once; Antoine's presence always had that effect on others, it seemed to emanate a vibrant energy.

"Hallo, Blackie!" he hailed her with a smile. ("Blackie" was a nickname which M. Thibault, in a burst of good humour, had bestowed on her. It dated from those far-off days when circumstances had compelled Mile, de Waize to adopt her little orphan niece and, taking the child under her wing, had introduced into the staid Thibault household what at the time had seemed to them an untamed little savage.)

"I suppose you have a crowd of patients this afternoon," Gise remarked, to make conversation. .

"All in the day's work," he cheerfully replied. "Will you come to the consulting-room? Or shall we stay here?" Without waiting for her answer he sat down beside her. "How are you getting on? We hardly ever seem to see each other nowadays. That's a pretty shawl… . Give me your hand." He took the little, unresisting hand without more ado, laid it flat upon his fist, and held it up to his eyes. "Not so plump as it used to be, your little hand." Gise smiled good-humouredly and Antoine saw two little dimples form in her brown cheeks. She made no effort to withdraw her arm, but Antoine felt that she was on her guard, ready to shrink from him. He all but murmured: "You're not so nice as you used to be before you went away," but thought better of it, and lapsed into a moody silence.

"Your father insisted on going back to bed, on account of his leg," she said evasively.

Antoine made no comment. What an age it was since he was last alone with Gise! He riveted his gaze on the small, dark hand, and his eyes followed the blue tracery of veins along the slender, well-knit wrist; then, examining the fingers one by one, he tried to laugh it off. "Do you know what they remind me of? Dainty little half-coronas!" But all the while, across a shimmering haze that seemed to rise before them, his eyes were lingering in an insidious caress on all the sinuous curves of her lithe, bent body, from the soft roundness of her shoulder to the angle of her knee under the silk shawl. It made his senses tingle, that languid grace of hers, so naive … and so near. Sudden and catastrophic, like a rush of blood to tbe head or a pent-up torrent chafing at the flood-gates, came a flood of desire. He almost yielded to an impulse to slip an arm around her, draw the young, lithe body closely to his side. But then … he only bowed his head and lightly pressed his cheek against the little hand. "How soft your skin is, Blackie!" he murmured. He lifted his eyes slowly towards her face and when she saw the look in them, a look of famished, almost insensate craving, instinctively Gise turned aside, withdrew her hand.

"What did you want to tell me?" she asked in a level tone.

Antoine pulled himself together.

"I've some terrible news to give you, my dear."

Terrible news? A dreadful fear leapt into her mind. Supposing …? Was this the bitter end of all her hopes? Her terror-stricken eyes swept round the room, lingering for an agonizing moment on each familiar landmark of her love.

"Father is dangerously ill, you know," Antoine went on.

At first it seemed she had not heard him; her thoughts had been so far away.

Then, "Dangerously ill?" she repeated and, as she spoke, grew suddenly aware that she had known it all' the time. Her brows lifted and her eyes showed an anxiety that was partly feigned.

"Do you mean that he will …?"

Antoine nodded. When he spoke again his tone implied that he had long foreseen that it would come to this.

"The operation last winter, the excision of the right kidney, served only one purpose, really: it prevented us from nursing any more illusions as to the nature of the tumour. The other kidney became infected almost immediately after. But since then the disease has taken a new turn, it's become generalized, and that's just as well, in a way. It helps us to keep the truth from the patient; he has no suspicions, no idea that it's a hopeless case."

There was a brief silence before Gise spoke again.

"How long do you think …?"

He observed her with satisfaction. She would make a good wife for a doctor. She knew how to face the inevitable; she had not shed a single tear. Those months she passed abroad had formed her character. And he regretted his habit of always regarding her as more of a child than she really was.

"Two or three months at the most," he replied in the same tone. Then added, rather hastily: "Very much less, perhaps."

Though inclined to be slow in the uptake, Gise guessed that Antoine's last remark had some special application to her, and was relieved when he went on to explain himself at once.

"Look here, Gise, now that you know the truth, can you really leave me all by myself? Must you go away again?"

She did not reply, but gazed sedately at the wall in front with bright and steady eyes. Her round little face seemed quite composed but for a tiny wrinkle that came and went incessantly between her brows, the only outward sign of her inward struggle. Her first response had been a thrill of affection; his appeal had touched her. It had come as a surprise that anyone should appeal to her for support—Antoine most of all, whom the whole family looked up to as a tower of strength.

No! She had seen through his ruse, guessed why he wanted to detain her at Paris; and all her being rebelled against it. Only by going to England could she carry out her great project, the one thing in the world for which she lived. If only she could have told Antoine all about it! No, that would be a betrayal of her heart's secret; more, a betrayal of it to the last person on earth to welcome such a confidence! Later on, perhaps … in a letter. But not now.

Her eyes remained obdurately focused on the middle distance. A bad sign, Antoine thought, but nevertheless persisted.

"Why won't you answer?"

A tremor shook her body, but her look was as determined as ever.

"But surely, Antoine, it's just the other way round. There's all the more reason for me to hurry up and get my English certificate. I shall have to start earning my living much sooner than I expected."

Antoine cut her short with a gesture of annoyance. On her tight mouth and in her eyes he was surprised to see what seemed the shadow of a despondency past all redress, and, at the same time, a rapture, a passion of wild, unreasoning hope. Obviously, there was no place for him in such feelings as those. In a spasm of vexation he tossed back his head. Vexation or despair? Rather despair; a lump rose in his throat, tears to his eyes. For once he did not try to check them or conceal them; they might help him yet to break down her incomprehensible resistance.

Gise was deeply touched; she had never seen Antoine cry, had never even dreamt he could do so. She avoided looking at him. Her affection for him was tender and profound, and she never thought of him without a quickening of the heart, a thrill of enthusiasm. For three years he had been her only comforter, a tried and stalwart comrade whose nearness was the one bright spot in her life. And now—why should he seem to want of her more than her trust, her loyal admiration? Why must she now conceal her sisterly regard?

A bell tinkled in the hall. Instinctively Antoine pricked up his ears. A sound of closing doors; then, once again, silence.

They sat there side by side, unmoving, unspeaking, while their thoughts raced on and on along divergent paths… .

At last the telephone rang. There was a footstep in the hall, and Léon appeared at the door.

"It's a call from upstairs, Miss. Dr. Thérivier has come to see M. Thibault."

Gise got up at once. Antoine called Léon back and asked in a weary voice:

"How many people in the waiting-room?"

"Four, sir."

Then he, too, rose; life took charge again. "And there's Rumelles expecting me at ten minutes to the hour!" he said to himself.

"I must go upstairs at once," she said, without coming near him. "Goodbye, Antoine."

He gave a slight shrug and his lips parted in a forced smile.

"All right, then, off you go … Blackie!" In the sound of his own voice he seemed to hear an echo of his father's "All right then, off you go, my boy!" earlier in the day—and the reminder galled him. He added in a different tone: "Please tell Thérivier that I can't get away just now. If he has anything to say he can drop in here on his way out. Got it?"

She nodded and opened the door; then, as if she had come to a sudden decision, she turned back to Antoine. No, it was useless. What could she say to him? Since she couldn't tell him everything, what would be the good? Wrapping her shawl more closely round her, she went out, her eyes still fixed on the ground.

"The elevator's just coming down," Léon pointed out. "Won't you wait for it, Miss?"

Shaking her head, she began to walk up the stairs, slowly, broodingly. All her will was bent on that one obsession: London! Yes, she must leave at the earliest moment, must not even wait till the end of her holiday. Oh, if only Antoine could guess all that it meant to her—to be over there, across the Channel!

It had happened two years ago, ten months after Jacques's disappearance. One morning in September Gise had chanced to meet the postman coming up the garden-path at Maisons-Laffitte, and he had handed her a hamper bearing the label of a London flower-shop and addressed to her. Puzzled, but with a sudden intuition that somehow it concerned her deeply, she contrived to reach her room without being seen, cut the string, tore off the lid, and all but fainted with emotion when she saw, lying on a bed of damp moss, a simple bunch of roses. Her thoughts flew to Jacques. Their roses! Crimson roses with tiny dusky hearts; exactly, yes, exactly the same. And September: the anniversary! The meaning of the nameless gift was as clear to her as a code-telegram, worded in a familiar code. Jacques was not dead, M. Thibault was wrong, Jacques was living in England, and—*Jacques loved her!* Her first impulse was to open the door wide, call out for all to hear: "Jacques is alive!" Just in time, she pulled herself together. Fortunately. How could she have explained just why it was these crimson roses conveyed so wonderful a meaning? They would badger her with questions and—anything, anything rather than betray her secret! Closing the door, she prayed to God for strength to hold her peace, till the evening, anyhow; for she knew that Antoine was expected back at Maisons for dinner.

That evening she led him aside and spoke to him of a mysterious present, a box of flowers sent her from London, where she knew no one; mightn't it be Jacques? In any case the clue should be followed up without delay. Antoine's interest was aroused, though a series of failures during the past year had made him sceptical, and lost no time in setting an inquiry on foot in London-The florist supplied a detailed description of the customer who had sent the flowers, but the man in question was not in the least like Jacques. So this line of inquiry also had been dropped.

But not by Gise. She alone had certain knowledge. But she said no more about it. With a power of self-control extraordinary for her seventeen years, she kept her secret. But she was determined to go to England and, cost what it might, to follow up Jacques's trail herself The plan seemed doomed to fail. But, for two long years, with the subtle, silent assiduity of the dark jungle-folk from whom she sprang, she had paved the way for her departure, and plotted it out, step by step. And what a struggle it had been! She recalled each gradual advance. She had needed all her patience, every artifice, to instill certain ideas into her aunt's reluctant mind. First, she had needed to convince her that a penniless young girl, even though she came of a good family, should be able to earn her living; then she had had to bring her round to the idea that her niece, like herself, had a vocation for educating young children, and furthermore that, considering the keen competition for such posts, it was essential nowadays for any would-be teacher to have a good command of English. Next, she had to inveigle her aunt into meeting a local woman-teacher who had just finished a course at an English training-school, established in the neighbourhood of London by a group of Catholic nuns. As good luck would have it, M. Thibault was moved to make inquiries and received a favourable report on the institution. In the previous spring, after a thousand and one delays, Mile, de Waize had at last been won over to her niece's view, and Gise had spent the summer in England. But those four months had not given the results she hoped for; she had been victimized by shady detective-agencies, and nothing but disappointment had come of her attempts. Now at last she would be able to take action and pull the necessary strings. She had just sold some jewellery and collected her savings. Moreover, she had at last got into touch with honest agencies. Best of all, she had managed to interest the daughter of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner in her romantic quest; she had been invited to lunch with the Commissioner on her return to England, and he well might prove a very useful friend in need. How then could she do otherwise than hope?

Gise had to ring at the door of the Thibaults' flat; her aunt had never let her have a latch-key.

"Yes, how can I do otherwise than hope?" she asked herself, and suddenly the certainty that she would find Jacques again came back with overwhelming force, sweeping all doubt before it. Antoine had said "it" might last three months. "Three months?" she murmured. "Why, in less than that I shall have succeeded!"

Meanwhile, downstairs, Antoine was standing where she had left him in Jacques's room, facing the closed door with a steadfast gaze that seemed to beat in vain against its dark, impenetrable barrier. He felt his life had reached a turning-point. Often in the past he had pitted his will against the most formidable difficulties, and overcome them, but never had he vainly grappled with a sheer impossibility. And, just now, something was being wrenched from his existence; it was not Antoine's way to persevere in a hopeless struggle.

He took two hesitating steps, glanced into the mirror, then, leaning on the mantelpiece, with his face thrust forward, gazed intently for some seconds at his reflected self. "And supposing she'd said it, like that: 'Yes, marry me'?" A thrill of retrospective apprehension ran through his body. "Playing with fire—a fool's game!" He turned on his heel. "Good Lord! It's five o'clock! And … how about Queen Elisabeth?"

As he hurried to the surgery Léon met him, his lips impassive as ever, a whimsical smile flickering on his lips.

"M. Rumelles has left. He's made an appointment for the same time tomorrow."

"Good," said Antoine, much relieved. And for the moment this small relief sufficed to blunt the edge of his chagrin.

He went back to the consulting-room, crossed it diagonally, and, slipping back the curtain with the familiar gesture which, every time he made it, gave him a vague satisfaction, opened the door of the waiting-room.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, with a friendly pinch of the cheek for a pale-faced little boy who came towards him, looking thoroughly scared. "So you've come all by yourself, like a big boy! How are your father and mother?"

Taking the child's arm, he led him to the window and, seated on a stool with his back to the light, pressed back the docile little head gently but firmly, so as to have a clear view of the throat. "Well, well," he murmured without raising his eyes, "there's no mistaking them this time, those tonsils of yours!" His voice had automatically regained the brisk and sonorous, almost astringent, quality which acted like a tonic on his patients.

As he bent forwards, gazing intently at the little boy, a sudden twinge of wounded pride fretted his mind and he could not repress the thought: "Anyhow, if I think fit, we can always wire for her to come back."

# VIII

AS HE was seeing the boy off, Antoine was not a little surprised to discover Mary, the English girl with the peach-bloom complexion, sitting in the hall. When he went up to her she rose and bestowed on him a leisurely, bewitching smile; then, silently but with a resolute air, she handed him a pale blue envelope.

Her present attitude, so changed from her aloofness of two hours ago, and her bold, if enigmatic, look convinced Antoine—though he could have given no reason for his belief—that there was something abnormal about her errand.

Much mystified, he remained standing in the hall and was hastily opening the envelope, when he observed the English girl deliberately making for the consulting-room, the door of which stood open. He followed her, unfolding the letter as he went.

> My Dear Doctor,
>
> I have two small requests to make of you and, to ensure they won't be frowned on, I send them by the least forbidding messenger I can find.
>
> Firstly, my scatter-brained little Mary was silly enough to wait till she had left your place before telling me that she'd been feeling out of sorts for some days past, and couldn't sleep for coughing the last few nights. Would you be so good as to give her a thorough going-over, and also your advice?
>
> Nextly, we have an old fellow, a retired keeper, living on the estate, who suffers most terribly from arthritis; the poor old chap goes through agonies at this time of the year. Simon has taken compassion on him and gives him injections to ease the pain. We usually keep some morphine in the house, but his last attacks have quite used up our little reserve and Simon has asked me to be sure and bring some back—which I can't do without a doctor's prescription. I quite forgot to tell you about it this afternoon. Now will you be terribly nice and give the charming bearer of this note a prescription—one which can be used again, if possible—so that I can get five or six dozen tubes at once?
>
> Thanks in advance for attending to my little "nextly." As to my request number one, which of us, my dear Doctor, should be the grateful one? I feel sure you often have much less attractive patients to examine!
>
> Very sincerely yours,
>
> Anne-Marie S. de Battaincourt.
>
> P.S. You may think it odd that Simon shouldn't ask our local doctor to fix it up. Well, he's a narrow-minded, fanatical old curmudgeon who always votes against us and has his knife into the "château people"— meaning us—for refusing to call him in. Otherwise, of course, I wouldn't have troubled you. A.

Though Antoine had read the last word he did not raise his eyes from the page. His first feeling was one of indignation—what did they take him for? Then the whole business struck him as rather comic; why not laugh over it instead?

There were two mirrors in the consulting-room and Antoine, who had once been caught that way himself, had learned a trick that could be played with them. From where he stood, resting his elbow on the mantelpiece, he had only to change the angle of his gaze under his lowered eyelids to study the English girl without her seeing it. He did so. Mary was sitting a little way behind him. She had unfastened her cape, freeing her neck and throat, and, while she pulled off her gloves, kept her eyes fixed, with a show of absent-mindedness, on her toe-cap, toying with a fringe of the carpet. She looked perturbed, but on her mettle. Thinking he could not see her without moving from where he was, with a sudden lift of her long eyelashes, she sped a quick glance at him, blue as lightning and as vivid.

Her indiscretion did away with any doubts that lingered still in Antoine's mind. He began to laugh and, with bent head, perused the fair tempter's letter for the last time; then slowly refolded it. Smiling still, he drew himself up and looked Mary in the face; each experienced a sudden shock, sharp as a blow, as eye met eye.

For a moment the English girl seemed in a quandary. He did not say a word but, dropping his eyelids, shook his head slowly from one side to the other several times, to signify an unequivocal "no." He still was smiling, but his expression made his meaning so clear that Mary could not be mistaken. It was exactly as if he were saying in so many words, with cool effrontery: "No, my dear young lady, there's nothing doing; it simply won't work. Don't imagine I'm shocked. I'm too old a hand at the game, you see, to be anything but amused. Only I must regretfully inform you that, even on the terms you offer, you'll get nothing out of me!"

She rose, speechless, her cheeks aflame with vexation, and, stumbling over the carpet, backed out into the hall. He escorted her out as calmly as if her hurried exit were not in the least unusual, but chuckling inwardly. Tongue-tied, her eyes fixed on the ground, she continued to retreat, trying to button up her collar with feverish, ungloved fingers that showed deathly pale against her blazing cheeks.

In the hall, when he moved to her side to open the door, she made as if to bow. He was just about to return her greeting when, with a brusque movement, she snatched the letter from his fingers and darted through the doorway; a professional pickpocket could not have done it more neatly.

Antoine could but pay grudging tribute to the girl's adroitness and presence of mind.

When he returned to his room he tried to picture their faces when the three of them—the fair Anne, Mary, and himself—would have their next encounter (in a few days, presumably) and, at the prospect, smiled again. A glove lay on the carpet; he picked it up and sniffed it before flinging it light-heartedly into the wastepaper basket… .

Those English girls … a queer lot! And Huguette, he wondered —what sort of life would she have, poor little thing, with those two women in charge of her?

Night was falling; Léon came in to close the shutters. "Has Mme. Ernst come?" Antoine asked after a glance at his engagement-book.

"Yes, sir, she's been here quite a time. There's a whole family of them: the mother, father, and a little boy."

"Good!" said Antoine cheerfully, as he swung back the curtain.

# IX

A LITTLE man, in the sixties, came forward to meet him.

"Would you be so very kind, doctor, as to see me first?" He spoke in a thick, somewhat drawling voice; his manner was that of a well-bred, rather timid man. "There are some things I should like to tell you."

Antoine carefully closed the door and pointed to a chair.

"My name is Ernst. Dr. Philip has told you, I presume… . Thank you," he murmured, settling down into the chair.

M. Ernst impressed Antoine favourably. He had deep-set eyes and a gaze that, for all its melancholy and wistfulness, glowed with youthful fervour. Not so his face, an old man's face; furrowed and worn, dried up yet fleshy, it was all in pits and ridges, without a level inch on it; chin, cheeks, and forehead, all seemed gouged and modelled out by some sculptor's rough thumb. A short, stiff, iron-grey moustache seemed to cut his face in two; his hair was sparse and drab, like the rank grass that sprouts on sand-dunes. It was impossible to tell if he was conscious of Antoine's tactful scrutiny.

"Anyone might take us for our little boy's grandparents," he observed sadly. "We married late in life. … I am a graduate of the Paris University and German teacher at the lycée Charlemagne."

"Ernst," said Antoine to himself, "and that accent of his. An Alsatian, most likely."

"I don't want to trespass on your time, doctor, but as you have kindly consented to take up our child's case it is my bounden duty, as I see it, to inform you of certain matters, *confidential* matters… ." He looked up, and a shadow fell across his eyes as he went on. "Matters, I mean to say, of which my wife knows nothing."

Antoine's nod conveyed his understanding of the secrecy required of him.

"Well, then, to begin… ." He seemed to be nerving himself for the plunge. Doubtless he had thought out all he was to say, for he now began to talk, his eyes fixed on the wall in front, in the easy, measured rhythm of one versed in the use of words. Antoine had a feeling that Ernst would rather not be looked at while he spoke.

"In 1896, doctor, I was forty-one and a master at the Versailles lycée." His voice lost something of its assurance. "I was engaged." He pronounced the word in three syllables, giving them a curious lilt, like three notes of a major chord, played an *arpeggio*. "I was, moreover," he continued in a more emphatic tone, "a fervent champion of the cause of Captain Dreyfus. You are too young, doctor, to realize all it meant, the moral drama of the Dreyfus case"—"tramma," he pronounced it, with a deep-pitched, solemn resonance —"still, you are doubtless aware how dangerous it was then for a man to be at once a government servant and a militant Dreyfusite. I was one of those who … who took that risk." His tone was calm, devoid of any bravado, but its firmness gave Antoine a good idea of what, some fifteen years before, had been the faith, the enterprise and rashness of this sedate old fellow with the gnarled forehead, obstinate chin, and eyes still darkly glowing with enthusiasm.

"I tell you this," M. Ernst went on, "to explain why it was that after the summer of '96 I was exiled to the lycée at Algiers. Meanwhile"—his voice grew gentler—"my engagement had been broken off; my brother-in-law to be, a naval officer (in the merchant marine, as it happens—but that made no difference), did not see eye to eye with me, you understand." Obviously he was doing his utmost to present the facts impartially.

"Four months after I landed in Africa," he continued in a lower voice, "I found that I was … ill." His voice faltered once more, but he mastered his weakness. "Why be afraid of words? I had developed syphilis."

So that's it, Antoine thought. The little boy . … That explains everything.

"I lost no time in consulting several doctors attached to the Faculty of Medicine at Algiers, and on their advice put myself in the hands of the best local specialist." He seemed reluctant to give the name. "It was Dr. Lohr; you know his work, very likely," he said at last, without looking towards Antoine. "The disease was taken at its first stage; only the primary lesion had developed. I was the type of man who obeys his doctor's orders, however irksome, to the letter. That is what I did. When four years later the excitement of the Dreyfus case had died down and I was recalled to Paris, Dr. Lohr assured me that, for a year past, he had considered me completely cured. I believed him. Anyhow, since then I have not detected any indications, not the slightest symptom, of a relapse."

He turned calmly towards Antoine and looked him full in the eyes. Antoine's gesture indicated that he was listening attentively.

But he was not merely listening; he was observing the man himself. Both the look and the demeanour of the little schoolmaster told Antoine of a life of faithful, unremitting service. He had met others of his kind before, but in this case he deemed the man superior to his calling. Obviously, too, his attitude of reserve had long since become second nature with him; he had cultivated the fastidious aloofness that, for certain finer natures, is their only refuge from the struggle for existence, a life of thankless toil which, for all its scant rewards, is accepted with a loyal, steadfast heart. The tone in which he had alluded to the broken engagement expressed better than any words how much that thwarted love had counted in his lonely life, and the veiled emotion that sometimes lit his eyes was poignant evidence that the grey-haired pedagogue was no less keenly sensitive than a youngster in his teens.

"Six years after my return to France," he went on, "my fiancée lost her brother." He groped for words, then added simply: "So I could see her again."

His feelings overpowered him, he could not continue. Antoine kept his eyes lowered and observed a tactful silence. He was almost startled by the sudden outburst of emotion that ensued.

"Doctor, I don't know what opinion you may have of a man who acts as I did then. My illness—why, it was ancient history, ten years had elapsed! Past and done with. I was over fifty… ." He sighed. "And my loneliness had been weighing on me all those years…But I'm afraid it's a muddled sort of story I'm telling you, doctor!"

Antoine looked up, but, even before he saw the face of the man before him, he had understood everything. That he had begotten a mentally defective son would in itself be a bitter enough trial in all conscience for a man of erudition. But what was that beside the

agony of a father who, racked by remorse, aware that the responsibility was his alone, could only watch the progress of a nemesis that he had set in action, and could not avert?

"All the same I wasn't easy in my mind about it," Ernst continued in a weary voice. "I intended to consult a doctor and nearly did so. No, that's not true. One mustn't burke the truth. I convinced myself that it was needless. I reminded myself of Lohr's opinion, and tried to find some easier way out. One day I met a doctor at a friend's house and steered the conversation towards that topic, just to have him confirm Lohr's opinion—that the disease can be *permanently* cured. That was all I needed to set my mind at rest."

He paused again.

"And then, I said to myself, a woman of her age—there's … there can't be any danger of her having a … a child."

His voice failed in a sob, but he still kept his head high, and as he sat there, unmoving, his fingers tightly clenched, such was the nervous tension of all his body that Antoine could see the muscles throbbing in his neck, while across a film of unshed tears his eyes glowed still more deeply. He made an effort to go on speaking, but his voice broke in a strangled cry of grief.

"Doctor … I'm so sorry for … for the poor little fellow!"

Antoine was deeply moved. Happily for him such violent emotions were apt to key him up to a pitch of feverish excitement, an almost frenzied urgency to make a prompt decision, and act upon it.

He did not hesitate for a second.

"Eh? What's that?" he exclaimed in a tone of feigned bewilderment. He stood up, knitting his brows; it seemed that he had only the haziest idea of what his visitor was driving at, and hesitated to believe his ears. "What possible connexion can there be between that … that little misfortune of yours, which was taken in hand at once and completely cured, and your little boy's infirmity—which very likely will pass away quite soon?"

Ernst stared at him, dumbfounded.

Antoine's face lit up with a genial smile.

"If I've grasped your meaning, my dear sir, your scruples do you credit. But, speaking as a professional man, let me tell you quite frankly: from the scientific point of view they're simply … ludicrous!"

M. Ernst rose, as though some sudden impulse drew him towards Antoine. But then he stood stock-still, his eyes distraught with emotion. He was one of those beings whose mental life is deep-set, all of one piece, and who, when once a noxious thought begins to fester in their minds, unable to restrict its influence, surrender to it heart and soul. For years it had been rankling in his heart, that infinite remorse whose secret he had never dared to share even with his companion in distress; this was his first moment of respite, his first hope of deliverance.

Antoine had diagnosed his feelings. But, fearing to be pressed with questions and driven back on detailed and complicated lies, he deliberately changed the subject… . And, anyhow, why waste more time on such futile and depressing fancies?

"Was the child born before term?"

M. Ernst blinked at Antoine; the question took him by surprise.

"What? Before term? … No."

"Was it a difficult labour?"

"Very much so."

"Forceps used?"

"Yes."

"Ah," Antoine murmured as though it threw a flood of light on the problem. "That, I should say, explains quite a lot." Then, to cut things short, he added: "Well, let's have a look at our little patient," and began to move towards the waiting-room.

But then the child's father stepped quickly forward and clutched Antoine's arm.

"Is that true, doctor? Is it really true? You're not saying it just to …? Oh, doctor, will you give me your word for it? Your word of honour?"

Antoine swung round towards him and saw a look of entreaty, of famished hunger to believe, mingled with boundless gratitude. The joy that surged across him was that which follows only on successful effort, on a good deed well done. The child? Well, he would see what he could do. Meanwhile, where the man before him was concerned, his duty was plain; at all costs he must lift the load of anguish from that tormented soul.

He let his gaze sink into the other's eyes, and answered in a deep, emphatic voice:

"I give you my word of honour!"

After a moment's silence he opened the door.

In the other room he saw an elderly lady in black and a playful little scamp with curly brown hair whom she was trying to keep quiet, penning him between her knees. Antoine's first glance was for the child who, at the sound of the opening door, had stopped playing, to gaze with big, dark, intelligent-looking eyes at the stranger. He smiled; then, scared by his own smile, turned sulkily away.

Antoine shifted his gaze towards the child's mother. There was a sad and gentle beauty in her careworn features that went straight to Antoine's heart. "Courage!" he said to himself. "It's only a matter of putting one's will into it. It's *always* possible to get results."

"Would you mind coming this way?"

Raising the curtain to let her pass, followed by the child, he gave the poor woman a reassuring smile—that crumb of comfort, anyhow, he could bestow on her at once. He could hear the laboured breathing of the man behind him as, patiently holding back the curtain, he watched mother and child coming towards him, and a wave of elation swept over his mind. "What a fine profession it is!" he murmured to himself. "Yes, by God, the finest in the world!"

# X

NIGHT had come before the steady stream of patients ceased, but Antoine was oblivious both of the time and of his own exhaustion; as often as he raised the curtain, his energy revived without an effort to meet the new occasion. When he had seen out the last caller, a handsome young woman hugging a strapping baby that was threatened, he feared, with almost total blindness, he was amazed to discover it was eight o'clock. "Too late for the kid with the boil," he ' said to himself. "I'll look in on my way back from Hequét's, later in the evening."

He went back to the consulting-room, opened the window to change the air, and, standing at a low table piled with books, hunted for one to read while he was dining. "Ah, yes," he reminded himself, "I've got to check that reference—the Ernst child's case." He fluttered the pages of some back numbers of the *Neurological Review*, trying to trace the epoch-making symposium on aphasia that took place in 1908. "A really typical case, that Ernst boy; I must tell Treuillard about it."

A smile of amusement flickered on his face as he remembered Treuillard's eccentric ways, a byword in the profession. He called to mind the year he had spent as the nerve-specialist's assistant. "What the devil possessed me to do it?" he asked himself. "Looks as if I've always had a hankering after that branch of medicine. Perhaps I'd have done better to devote myself to nervous and mental diseases. That's a field where much remains still to be discovered." Suddenly a picture formed before his eyes … of Rachel. Now what association of ideas had brought her into his mind? She'd had no medical or scientific training, of course; yet psychological problems of every kind had always appealed to her very strongly. Yes, there was no doubt she had played a part in developing the keen interest he now felt in other people's lives. In any case—he had noticed it time and time again—she had changed him in a thousand different ways.

A faraway look, a shade of melancholy, dimmed his eyes as he stood beside the table, his shoulders bowed with weariness, swinging the medical journal to and fro between his thumb and forefinger. Rachel! He never could recall without a rush of bitterness the enigmatic girl who had flashed across his life. Never had he received a line of news from her. And, indeed, this did not surprise him; that somewhere in the world Rachel was still alive seemed most improbable. She had succumbed, more likely, to the climate, or malaria, or the tsetse. Or, perhaps, she had come to a violent end, been drowned, or, quite possibly, strangled. Dead she was—of that he was convinced.

He drew himself up and, slipping the journal under his arm, went out into the hall and told Léon to bring his dinner. One of the chief's sallies came back to his mind. Philip had been away and, on his return, Antoine had given him a brief account of the new patients who had come for treatment; laying his hand on Antoine's arm, the chief had observed in a tone of affectionate irony: "Better look out, my boy! You're getting more and more interested in your patients' mentalities, and less and less in their complaints!"

As Antoine settled down into his chair before the steaming soup-tureen, he realized how tired he was. "Still, it's a fine profession!" he consoled himself.

His talk with Gise came back to him and, to dispel the memory, he made haste to open the bulky review. In vain; the very air of the room, where something of her presence lingered, seemed still charged with cruel evidences of his failure. He recalled certain obsessions of the past few months. How was it he had dallied a whole summer long with so impossible a project? Now he could look upon his shattered dream as on the wreckage of some flimsy palace on a stage, crumbled into a heap of insubstantial dust. He suffered little or not at all. Only his vanity was wounded. And now it seemed to him that there had been something shoddy about the whole affair, something puerile and beneath him.

A timid ring at the door-bell came as a welcome interruption. He put down his napkin and pricked up his ears, his hand resting on the tablecloth, ready to rise from his seat at a moment's notice.

He heard a palaver in the hall, and women whispering. Then the door opened and, to his surprise, Léon showed two women into the room without more ado. They proved to be M. Thibault's maids. At first, in the dim light, Antoine failed to recognize them; then it suddenly struck him that they had come to fetch him, and he jumped up so hastily that his chair toppled over behind him.

"No, sir, no!" they cried in the utmost confusion. "Please excuse us, sir. We thought we'd give less trouble if we came at this time."

"Yes, I thought Father had died," Antoine said to himself so calmly that he realized how well prepared he was for that to happen. The possibility that the phlebitis might have caused an embolism had crossed his mind immediately. When he thought of the lingering agony that such a development would have averted, he could not help feeling almost disappointed.

"Sit down," he said. "I'll go ahead with my dinner, as I've some more visits to make this evening."

The two women remained standing.

Jeanne, their mother, had been M. Thibault's cook for a quarter of a century. She was now past work, her legs were raddled with varicose veins, and she herself admitted that her place , was "on the shelf." Now the old woman's working days were done, her daughters installed her daily in an arm-chair facing the kitchen range, and there she spent her days, wielding an ineffectual poker. She still enjoyed a feeble illusion of responsibility, for she had a finger in every pie, occasionally whipped the mayonnaise, and plagued her daughters (both women in the thirties) with good advice from morn till night. Clotilde, the elder of the two, was a sturdy wench, devoted if somewhat disobliging, a chatterbox but a hard worker. She had been employed on a farm for many years and had retained a rough-and-ready manner and a racy vocabulary like her mother's;' she did the cooking. Adrienne, who had had a convent education and always been in service in town, was more refined than her elder sister; she had a weakness for dainty lingerie, sentimental ballads, a nosegay on her work-table, and "pretty services" on church-days.

Clotilde, as usual, did the talking.

"It's on account of Mother we've come to see you, M. Antoine. It's been hurting her something awful for the last few days, poor thing, and no mistake! There's a big lump she has in front, on her right side. She can't sleep of nights and when she goes to the bathroom, poor old soul, you can hear her whimpering like a child. But she's plucky, Mother is; she never says a word. You might

have a look at her, sir, without letting on what you're about—eh, Adrienne?— and then you're sure to see the great bulge she has there, under her apron."

"Right you are!" said Antoine, taking out his note-book. "I'll find some excuse for visiting the kitchen tomorrow."

While her sister talked, Adrienne busied herself changing Antoine's plate, moving the bread within his reach, and making herself generally useful at table—by force of habit. She had said nothing so far, but now she put a question in an unsteady voice.

"Do you think, sir, that it's … it's likely to be dangerous?"

A tumour which develops so quickly … Antoine reflected. And, an operation at her time of life—much too risky! He visualized with pitiless precision the course a case like the old woman's might take: the huge proliferation of the neoplasm, its fatal progress, the gradual constriction of the organs, and—most horrible of all—the body's slow decomposition; a death in life.

Lacking courage to meet her anxious gaze, which he could not have brought himself to answer with a lie, he looked askance, with knitted brows and lips set sulkily. Making an evasive gesture, he pushed his plate away from him. But just then fat Clotilde, who never could let a pause elapse without putting in a word, came opportunely to his rescue.

"Of course there's no knowing it right away like that; M. Antoine must have a look at her first. But there's one thing I can tell you: my poor husband's mother, well, she died of a cold on her chest after going about for fifteen years and more with a lump just like that one in her stomach!"

# XI

A QUARTER of an hour later Antoine had made his way to B37 Rue de Verneuil and was entering a dark courtyard surrounded by a block of antiquated buildings. Room 3 was on the sixth story, the first door in a passage that reeked of gas.

Robert opened the door; he had a lamp in his hand.

"How's your brother?"

"Quite well now, sir."

The lamplight fell full on the boy's eyes, cheerful and candid eyes, but with a glint of hardness in them, wise before their time; a childish face, tense with precocious energy.

Antoine smiled.

"Let's have a look at him."

Taking the lamp from the boy's hand, Antoine held it aloft to get a better view of his surroundings. A round table spread with oilcloth took up most of the room. Robert had evidently been writing; a bulky ledger lay open between an uncorked ink-bottle and a pile of plates, on top of which reposed a hunk of bread and a couple of apples: a humble still-life. The room was tidy, almost comfortable. A kettle was singing on a little stove in front of the fireplace.

Antoine went up to the high-pitched mahogany bedstead at the far end of the room.

"Asleep, were you?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

The little boy, who had obviously wakened with a start, was propping himself on his unbandaged arm, wide-eyed and smiling fearlessly.

His pulse was regular. Antoine placed on the bedside table the box of gauze which he had brought, and began to take off the bandage.

"What's that you're boiling on the stove?"

"Just water." Robert laughed. "We were going to have something hot to drink; the concierge gave me some lime-flowers to flavour it." Suddenly his eyelashes began to quiver. "Won't you have some, sir? With sugar. Do try it, sir! It's awfully nice like that!"

"No, thanks, really." Antoine was amused by the boy's eagerness. "What I want is a little boiled water for washing his arm. Just pour some into a clean plate. Right. Now we must wait for it to cool off." He sat down and looked at the children, who were beaming at him as if they had known him all their lives. Yes, he thought, they look decent little lads—but can one ever be really sure? He turned to the older boy.

"How is it that two kids like you come to be living here on your own?"

The boy's eyelashes fluttered and he made a vague gesture, as if to say: "Beggars can't be choosers!"

"What about your father and mother?"

"Oh, they …!" Robert's tone implied that such a question really harked back much too far into the past. "We used to live with Auntie." He pointed to the big bed with a meditative air. "She died there in the middle of the night; on the tenth of August it was, over a year ago. And an awfully bad time we had after that, eh, Eddie? Luckily we were on the soft side of the concierge and she didn't say anything to the old landlord, so we didn't have to leave."

"How about the rent?"

"It's paid."

"Who pays it?"

"We do."

"Where does the money come from?"

"Why, what d'you think? We earn it. I do, that is to say. He, you see—well, that's where the shoe pinches. Got to find him another job. He's at Brault's—do you know the shop?—in Grenelle; he's their errand-boy. Forty francs a month, all told. Rotten pay, isn't it? Why, you've only got to figure out what he costs in shoe-leather!"

He paused, all eyes for Antoine, who had just removed the bandage. The abscess showed little suppuration, the swelling of the arm had gone down, and the wound looked healthy.

"And how about you?" asked Antoine, as he dipped the dressing in the water.

"Me?"

"Well, you earn your living somehow, don't you?"

"Me …?" Robert repeated in a dawdling voice that suddenly slapped out like a flag in the wind. "You bet I do! I know a trick or two, what's more!"

Antoine glanced up in some surprise and his eyes met a look, keen as a razor-blade, a rather disconcerting look, on the high-strung, resolute little face.

The boy asked nothing better than to talk. How to earn one's living—that was the theme of themes, the only one that counted, the dominant of all his thoughts since ever he began to think. He started with a rush, eager to pour out everything, to unload all his secrets.

"When Auntie died I was only making sixty francs a month as a copyist. Now that I attend the courts as well, my pay's a hundred and twenty francs. Then M. Lamy, the head clerk, fired the office-cleaner—the man who shines the floor each morning—and gave me his job. A lazy old fellow he was, too; never cleaned the floor except there'd been a rainy day, and then only in front of the window where the mud shows. They did well out of the change, you bet! I get another ninety-five francs for that, and it's fine sport polishing the floor every morning, just like roller-skating!" He gave a little whistle. "But that's not all. I've got some other little grafts."

He paused, waiting for Antoine to look again in his direction; then, at a glance, he seemed to sum his man up once for all. Favourable though the judgment was, he evidently thought it best to lead off with a word of warning.

"I don't mind telling you, as I know it's safe with you. But you mustn't ever let on you know about it, eh?" He began to speak more loudly, warming up to his subject as he went on. "You know Mme. Jollin, the concierge at No. 3 in front of your place? Well—but mum's the word, don't forget!—well, the old dame makes cigarettes on the q.t. Say, I wonder if you'd care to …? No? They're Ai smokes, you know—mild and not too tight-packed. Dirt cheap, too. I'll bring you some to sample. Anyhow, it seems it's a hell of a business if you get copped making cigarettes to sell like that. So she needs someone to take round the packages and collect the cash, someone who knows his way around. That's my job; after office-hours, from six to eight, I go my rounds, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. She gives me lunch every day except Sundays for my trouble. And a mighty good cook she is, I'll say that for her. Just think what I save! Not to mention that the customers—they're all of them real sports—nearly always slip a nice little tip into my hand, a franc or fifty centimes, it's a matter of luck. Anyhow every little helps, as they say, and we don't do too badly."

He paused. From his tone Antoine could guess the look of pride that sparkled in his eyes, but he purposely refrained from looking up.

Robert, now he was started, rattled on cheerfully.

"When the kid comes back in the evening, he's dog-tired, so we have our grub here; soup, or eggs, or a hunk of cheese, it don't take long anyhow. That's much better than going round the lunch-counters, eh, Eddie? Now and then, like tonight, I spend the evening writing up headings for the cashier. They're nice—aren't they?—big, fat round-hand titles like that; why, I could write 'em just for the fun of it. At the office they …"

"Hand me the safety-pins, will you?" Antoine broke in, feigning indifference to the boy's chatter; he was afraid of giving the youngster a taste for showing off. Inwardly, however, he saiti to himself: "These kids are worth keeping an eye on!"

The dressing had been renewed, the arm was back in its sling. Antoine glanced at his watch.

"I'll look in once again tomorrow, about noon. After that you can come to my place. You'll be fit to go back to work on Friday or Saturday, I guess."

After a moment's silence the little boy stammered: "Th … thank you, sir." His voice was just breaking and he jerked the words out with such incongruous emphasis, they cut so quaintly through the silence, that Robert burst out laughing. There was an unnatural shrillness in his laugh, which gave a sudden indication of the state of nervous tension in which the high-strung little fellow always lived.

Antoine took twenty francs from his purse.

"To help you through the week, young fellows."

Robert recoiled as if he had been stung; frowning, he looked up at Antoine.

"No, sir, no! We couldn't think of it. Didn't I tell you we have all we need?" Then, to convince Antoine, who, in haste to be off, was beginning to insist, he launched his Parthian shot: ' "Do you know how much we've saved, just us two? A nice little nest-egg—guess! Seventeen hundred of the best! Yes, sir. Haven't we, Eddie?" Then suddenly his voice dropped to a whisper like the villain's in a melodrama. "Not to mention a heap more that will be rollin' in, if my little scheme comes off!"

Such eagerness was in his eyes that Antoine's curiosity was whetted and he halted on the threshold.

"Yes, quite a new dodge. It's like this… . Bassou—he's a clerk in our office—has a brother who is a salesman for wine, olive-oil and so forth. Here's the idea! On my way back from the courts in the afternoon—that's nobody's business, eh?—I drop in at all the taverns, grocers', wine-merchants', and show them my stuff. I haven't got the patter off yet—but that'll come with practice. Anyhow, I've placed quite a lot of kegs this last week. Forty-four francs' rake-off. And Bassou says that, if I'm fly …"

Antoine chuckled as he hurried down the six flights of stairs. Yes, they'd quite won his heart, the youngsters, and he'd do anything for them. "All the same," he added to himself, "I'd better watch out and see they don't become *too* 'fly'!"

# XII

IT WAS raining; Antoine took a taxi. As he neared the Faubourg Saint-Honore his cheerfulness evaporated and a frown settled on his brows.

"If only it were all over!" he said to himself as, for the third time that day, he gloomily climbed the three flights of stairs. When he reached the door of the Hequéts' flat he fancied for a moment that his wish had been fulfilled. The maid who opened the door looked at him in a peculiar manner and stepped forward hastily to whisper something in his ear. But it was only a private message from Mme. Hequét that she imparted; her mistress wanted Antoine to see her first, before going to the child.

There was no eluding it. The light was on in Nicole's room; the door stood open. As he entered he saw her head lying on the pillow. He walked up to the bedside. She did not stir. She had obviously dozed off, and it would have been brutal to disturb her. In repose she looked much younger, care-free, now that sleep had smoothed away the lines of grief and weariness. Antoine gazed at her, holding his breath, afraid to move; it startled him to read upon those features, whence sorrow had withdrawn itself only so short a while ago, this all so sudden ecstasy, so keen a longing for oblivion and happiness. The pearly lustre of her closed eyelids, fringed with finespun, tenuous strands of gold, her languid grace and air of unconcern—all the naked, self-revealing beauty of the face before him made his senses tingle. How fascinating, too, the drooping curve of her mouth and the half-parted lips that now in their repose seemed to express only relief and hopefulness! "Why," Antoine asked himself, "why should the face of any young being seen asleep appeal to us so strongly? What instinct lies behind the thrill, the almost sensual thrill of pity it evokes in every one of us?"

Turning away, he tip-toed soundlessly from the room. Though the doors were shut the child's hoarse, incessant wailing come to his ears as he proceeded down the passage. With an effort he nerved himself to turn the handle, cross the threshold, and renew contact with the dark powers at work within.

The child's cradle had been placed in the middle of the room and Hequét was seated beside it, his hands resting on the edge, rocking it slowly, intently, to and fro. On the far side of the cradle the night-nurse, her hands pressed tight against her apron, her veiled grey forehead bent above the child, sat waiting like an effigy of disciplined, indomitable patience. Isaac Studler, ungainly as ever in his white linen coat, was leaning against the mantelpiece, with folded arms, stroking his jet-black beard.

The nurse rose as the doctor came in. But Hequét, his eyes fixed on the child, did not seem to notice anything. Not till Antoine went up to the cradle did Hequét raise his head towards him, with a sigh. Antoine had hastily grasped the burning little hand that fluttered on the coverlet, and, as he did so, the child's body seemed to shrink away, like some tiny insect trying to wriggle back into its hole. The child's face was red and mottled, almost the colour of the ice-bag placed behind her ear; her curls, as fair as Nicole's, clammy with sweat or wetted by the compresses, were smeared across her cheeks and forehead. Her eyes were half shut and between the eyelids the swimming pupils had a dull metallic lustre, like the eyes of butchered animals. The movement of the cradle rocked her head slowly to and fro, giving a rhythmic cadence to the moans that issued from the little parched throat.

The nurse made as if to fetch the stethoscope, but Antoine signed to her he did not need it.

"It's an idea of Nicole's," Hequét suddenly remarked in an unnatural, almost high-pitched tone. Then, seeing Antoine's puzzled look, he explained in a studiously level voice: "The cradle. Yes. It's Nicole's idea." He smiled uncertainly; across the twilight of his mind such details seemed to loom out in preternatural relief. "Yes," he added almost in the same breath, "we went and fetched it from the attic. Covered with dust. It's the only thing that calms her a bit, you see, being rocked like that."

Antoine gazed at him compassionately and, as he did so, realized how very far his pity, for all its deep sincerity, fell short of such a sorrow. He placed his hand on Hequét's arm.

"You're utterly fagged out, old man. You'd much better go and lie down for a while. What's the use of wearing yourself out?"

Studler put in a word.

"Yes, it's the third night you haven't slept."

"Do be reasonable now," Antoine insisted, bending towards his friend. "You'll be needing all the strength you have—very soon." He felt an almost physical impulsion to drag the unhappy man away from contact with the cradle, to plunge as soon as might be all that unavailing anguish in the anodynes of sleep.

Hequét did not answer, but went on rocking the cradle. His shoulders sagged more and more, as though Antoine's "very soon" had laid on them a burden not to be endured. Then, of his own accord, he rose, beckoned to the nurse to take his place beside the cradle, and, without waiting to dry his tear-stained cheeks, moved his head slowly round as if in search of something. At last he went up to Antoine and tried to look him in the face. Antoine was struck by the changed expression of his near-sighted eyes; their look of keen alertness had lost its edge, they seemed to move stiffly in their sockets, tending to settle down into a heavy, torpid stare.

Hequét gazed at Antoine and his lips moved before the words came out.

"Something—something *must* be done," he murmured. "She's in great pain, you know that. Why let her go on suffering? Don't … don't you agree? We must have the courage to … to do something." He paused, seeming to look to Studler for support; then once again his heavy gaze rested on Antoine. "Look here, Thibault, you must do something." Then, as though to elude Antoine's answer, he let his head fall, shambled across the room, and left the two men to themselves.

For some moments Antoine seemed incapable of movement; a sudden blush darkened his cheeks. His mind was a ferment of conflicting thoughts.

Studler tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well?" he asked in a low tone, watching Antoine's face. Studler's eyes resembled those of certain horses—over-large and elongated eyes, with languid pupils slackly floating in pools of watery whiteness. Just now, however, his look, like Hequét's, was searching, masterful.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he whispered.

In the brief silence that ensued each felt the impact of the other's thought.

"What will I do?" Antoine echoed evasively. But he knew that Studler would not let him off without an explanation. "Damn it!" he broke out. "Of course I realize… . But when he says 'do something' one daren't even appear to understand!"

"Hush!" Studler whispered, glancing towards the nurse; then he led Antoine into the passage and closed the door.

"You're convinced, aren't you, that nothing can be done?" he asked.

"Quite convinced."

"And that there's not the least, not the very faintest hope?"

"Not the faintest."

"Well, then?"

Antoine felt a mood of tense excitement gaining on him, and took refuge in an acrimonious silence.

"Well, then?" Studler insisted. "There's no use beating about the bush; the sooner it's ended, the better."

"And I assure you I want it to end quite as much as you do."

"Wanting's not enough."

Antoine raised his head and answered resolutely:

"That, unfortunately, is all that can be done."

"No!"

"Yes!"

The dialogue had grown so vehement that Studler kept silence for some seconds.

"Those injections," he presently observed. "I wonder now… . Supposing the doses were doubled? …"

Antoine cut him short.

"Hold your tongue, damn it!"

His mind was seething with exasperation. Studler watched him without speaking. Antoine's eyebrows stood out like an iron bar, in an almost straight line across his forehead, the muscles of his face twitched uncontrollably, dragging his mouth awry, and now and then a little stream of ripples fretted the tight-drawn skin, as though the nervous system just below the surface were in a state of violent commotion.

A minute passed.

"Hold your tongue!" Antoine repeated, but less harshly, stammering a little with excitement. "I know what you feel. We've all f-felt like that, wanted to cut things short; but that's just a beg-beginner's weakness. Only one consideration counts: the sanctity of human life. Yes. The sanctity of life. If you'd gone on with medicine, you'd see things in the same light as every other doctor. The necessity for certain fixed principles. A limit to our powers. Otherwise …"

"A limit? If a man's a man at all, the only limit is-—his conscience."

"Exactly! His conscience; his professional conscience. But just think, man! Supposing doctors were to claim the right to … Anyhow, Isaac, there isn't one who would, not one… ."

"In that case—" Studler hissed the words out. Antoine cut him short.

"Hequét has dealt with cases every bit as hopeless, as pit-pitiful as this one, dozens of times. But he's never once deliberately … Never. Nor has Philip, nor Rigaud, nor Treuillard. No doctor worthy of the name would dream of it, do you hear me? Never!"

"In that case," Studler broke out, "you doctors may set up to be the high priests of the world today, but to my mind you're just a pack of scrimshankers!"

As he moved back a step the light from the hanging lamp fell on his face. Its look conveyed more than his words had said; not only scorn and indignation but a sort of challenge, almost a threat—a secret will to act.

"That being so," Antoine said to himself, "I'll stay here till eleven and make the injection myself." He said no more but, with a shrug of his shoulders, went back to the bedroom and sat down.

The rain drummed on the shutters an endless monotone, and drippings from the eaves pattered incessantly upon the sill while, in the room, the swaying cradle timed the moaning of the dying child to its slow rhythm; and, across the hush of night, tense with death's immanence, all the sounds blended in a sad, persistent counterpoint.

"I stammered once or twice just now," Antoine, whose nerves were still on edge, muttered to himself. He was not often taken that way; it happened only when he had to keep up a distasteful pose—when, for example, he was forced to tell a complicated lie to some over-perspicacious patient, or when in conversation he was led to bolster up some conventional idea regarding which he had so far no personal convictions. "It's all the Caliph's fault!" With the corner of his eye he saw the "Caliph" back at his old place, leaning against the mantelpiece. He remembered Isaac Studler in his student days, when he had met him for the first time, ten years ago, in the neighbourhood of the School of Medicine. Bearded like a Persian king, with his silky voice and Rabelaisian laugh, the Caliph had been a familiar figure in the Latin Quarter of those days; then, too, there had been a truculent, subversive, and fanatical side to his character; half-measures were not the Caliph's way. An exceptionally brilliant future was predicted for him. Then one day the news went round that he had dropped his studies and set to earning his living; it was said that he had taken under his wing the wife and children of one of his brothers who had just killed himself after embezzling money from the bank where he was employed.

A shriller cry from the child cut short his musings. Antoine fixed his eyes for a moment on the writhing little body, trying to estimate the frequency of certain spasms, but there was nothing to be made of them; the movements were as incalculable as the palpitations of a chicken that is being bled. Then suddenly the feeling of unrest against which Antoine had been struggling ever since his passage of words with Studler grew to an acute distress. Ready though he always was to take the utmost risks when a patient's life was in danger, it was more than he could bear thus to come up against a hopeless situation, to feel so utterly at a loss for any form of action, condemned to watch the unseen enemy's triumphant progress with folded hands. And tonight the child's interminable struggle, her inarticulate cries, were working on Antoine's nerves with a peculiar urgency. Yet the sight of suffering, even the agony of little children, was nothing new to him. How was it that tonight he could not hold his feelings in? Confronted with the element of mystery and horror that attends a death-agony, he found himself tonight as impotent to curb his anguish as if he were the veriest novice. He was stirred to the depths of his being; his self-confidence was shaken—and, with it, his confidence in science, in activity, in life itself. Like a great wave, despair broke over him, dragging him down into the depths. In a ghastly pageant they streamed before his eyes, all

the patients he had written down as “hopeless cases.” Why, taking only those whom he had seen on this one day, the list was formidable in all conscience! Four or five hospital patients, Huguette, the Ernst boy, the blind baby, and now the child before him. And, doubtless, others too. Yes, his father; an old man with thick, milk-sodden lips, prisoned in an arm-chair. In a few weeks, after some days and nights of pain, the robust old veteran, too, would go their way. The way they all must go, one following the other. And in all this world-wide suffering there was no sense, no meaning… . “No, life’s absurd, a beastly thing!” he adjured himself furiously, as though to argue down some quite incorrigible optimist; and who was that confirmed, pig-headed optimist if not—himself, his normal self?

The nurse rose soundlessly. Antoine glanced at his watch; it was time for the injection. The pretext for moving, doing something, came as a vast relief; he felt almost cheerful, too, at the prospect of being able to get away from this room in a few minutes.

The nurse brought all he needed on a tray. Clipping off the tip of the ampoule, he plunged the needle in, filled the syringe to the prescribed level, then tipped out the contents of the ampoule (still three-quarters full) into the slop-pail. He could feel Studler’s gaze intent on him.

After making the injection he sat down again; it seemed to have eased the pain a little. He bent over the child, took her pulse once more—it was terribly weak—and whispered some instructions to the nurse. Then he rose without haste, washed at the basin, shook Studler’s hand without a word, and left the room.

He made his way out on tip-toe. The lights were on but no one was visible; Nicole’s door was shut. As he moved away the sound of wailing seemed to grow fainter. He opened and shut the hall-door noiselessly. Outside, on the landing, he paused and listened. Not a sound. With a deep sigh of relief he sped briskly down the stairs.

Out in the street he could not refrain from gazing up towards the dark facade cut by a string of lighted windows as though a party were being given in the Hequéts’ flat.

The rain had just stopped and the pavements were streaming after the downpour. As far as eye could reach the empty streets shimmered with liquid light.

Antoine felt a sudden chill; turning up the collar of his coat, he quickened his steps.

# XIII

A SOUND of water dripping; rain-drenched pavements. Suddenly the picture rose before him of a face streaming with tears, of Hequét standing there, Hequét's insistent gaze. "Look here, Thibault, you *must* do something!" For all his efforts to dispel it, the harrowing vision held his eyes a while. "A father's love," he mused; "yes, that's a feeling utterly unknown to me, however much I try to picture it." Suddenly the thought of Gise leapt to his mind. "A home. Children." An idle dream, all that, and, happily, unrealizable. That idea of marriage, why, now it struck him as more than premature; grotesque! "Am I an egoist?" he wondered. "Or is it simply cowardice?" His thoughts turned a new corner. "Anyhow, there's someone damns me for a coward just now, and that's the Caliph!" He remembered disgustedly the way Studler had cornered him in the passage, the man's hot, vulgar face and stubborn eyes. He struggled to brush away the swarm of ideas which ever since that moment had been buzzing in his brain. "A coward?" Rather an obnoxious word, that! "Over-cautious," perhaps. "Studler thought me over-cautious. The damned fool!"

He had reached the Elysee. A patrol of military police had just completed their circuit of the Palace. There was a clatter of rifle-butts on the sidewalk. Before he could avert their onset a horde of wild imaginings, like the protean pageant of a dream, streamed through his mind. He pictured Studler sending the nurse out of the room, taking a syringe from his pocket. Presently the nurse came back and passed her fingers over the little corpse. Then … ugly rumours; a report of the police; burial refused; an autopsy. The coroner; the police. "I'll take the blame." He was passing a sentry-box just then, and glared defiantly at the sentry within. "No," he heard himself affirming boldly to a phantom coroner, "no injections were made by anyone except myself. I administered an over-dose—deliberately. It was a hopeless case, and I take upon myself all the …" Shrugging his shoulders, he smiled and quickened his step. "What drivel I'm thinking!" But well he knew he had not laid the spectres of his mind. "If I'm so ready to take the blame for a fatal dose administered by another man, why did I so emphatically refuse to administer it myself?"

Whenever a brief but strenuous mental effort failed, if not to clarify a problem, at least to throw some light on it, he always felt intensely irritated. He recalled the passage of words with Studler, when he had lost his temper, stammered. He did not regret it in the least; yet he was unpleasantly aware that he had played a part and voiced opinions which were somehow out of keeping with his personality as a whole, disloyal to his truest self. He had, moreover, a vague but galling presentiment of a day to come when his outlook and conduct might well belie his attitude and words on this occasion. His sense of self-disapproval must have been keen indeed for Antoine now to feel so impotent to shake it off; as a rule he firmly refused to pass judgment on any of his acts; the feeling of remorse was wholly foreign to his nature. True, he enjoyed studying himself; of recent years, indeed, he had made a veritable hobby of self-analysis—but always from a strictly scientific point of view. Nothing could be more alien to his character than to sit in moral judgment on himself.

Another question shaped itself in his mind, adding to his perplexity. "Would it not have needed greater strength of mind to consent, than to refuse, to act?" Whenever he had to choose between two alternatives and when, all things considered, one seemed as cogent as the other, he usually chose the line of action involving the greater exercise of will-power; experience had taught him, so he averred, that this was almost always the better one to follow. But tonight he had to admit that he had chosen the line of least resistance, followed the beaten track.

Some of his own remarks still echoed in his ears. He had prated to Studler of "the sanctity of life." A ready-made phrase, and treacherous like all its kind. We "reverence" life, we say—or do we make a fetish of it?

He recalled an incident which had struck his imagination at the time—the case of the bicephalous child at Tréguineuc. Some fifteen years earlier, at the Breton seaport where the Thibaults were passing the summer holidays, a fisherman's wife had given birth to a freak of nature, with two separate, perfectly formed heads. Father and mother had begged the local doctor to put an end to the little monstrosity, and, when he refused to do so, the father, a notorious drunkard, had flung himself on the new-born child and attempted to strangle it. It had been necessary to secure him, lock him up. There was great excitement in the village and it was a burning topic at the dinner-tables of the summer visitors. Antoine, who was sixteen or seventeen at the time, had embarked on a heated discussion with his father (it was one of the first occasions on which father and son came into violent conflict), Antoine insisting, with the naive intractability of youth, that the doctor should be permitted to cut short a life, doomed from the outset, without more ado.

It startled him to find how little his point of view regarding such a case had changed. "What view would Philip take?" he asked himself. The answer was not in doubt; Antoine could but admit that the idea of ending the child's life would never have crossed Philip's mind. What was more, did any dangerous malady develop, Philip would have strained every nerve to save its miserable life. Rigaud would have done the same thing. Terrignier, too. And Loiselle. So would every doctor. Wherever the least spark of life remains, the doctor's duty is imperative. Saviours of life, like trusty Saint Bernards! Philip's nasal voice droned in his ears: "You've no choice, my boy; you haven't the right …!"

Antoine rebelled. " 'The right'? Look here, you know as well as I do what they amount to, those ideas of 'right' and duty. The laws of nature are the only laws that count; they, I admit, are ineluctable. But all those so-called moral laws, what are they really? A complex of habits, foisted upon us by the past. Just that. Long ago they may have served their purpose, as furthering man's social progress. But what of today? Can you, as a thinking man, assign to all those antiquated rules of hygiene and public welfare a sort of divine right, the status of a categorical imperative?" And, as no answer was forthcoming from the chief, Antoine shrugged his shoulders and, thrusting his hands deeper into his overcoat pockets, crossed to the opposite sidewalk.

He walked blindly ahead, debating still—but only with himself. "One thing's sure: for me, morality simply doesn't exist! 'Ought' and 'ought not,' 'right' and 'wrong,' are meaningless to me—just words I use, like everyone else, as the small change of conversation; but in my heart I've always known they have no application to reality. Yes, I've *always* thought like that. No, that's going too far. I've thought like that since …" Rachel's face rose suddenly before his eyes. "Well, for quite a long time, anyhow." For a while he made a

conscientious effort to sort out the principles governing his daily life. He could find none. “A kind of sincerity?” he ventured tentatively. He thought again and found a better definition. “Isn’t it rather a kind of clear-sightedness?” His mind was still unsettled, but he was fairly satisfied with his discovery. “Yes. Obviously it doesn’t amount to much. But, when I look into myself, my impulse to think clearly— well, it’s about the only sure and solid thing I can find. Very likely I’ve made of it—unconsciously, no doubt—a kind of moral principle, my private creed. ‘Complete freedom, provided I see clearly.’ That sums it up, I imagine. Rather a risky principle, when you look into it. But it works out pretty well. The way one sees things, that’s the only thing that matters. To profit by one’s scientific training and examine oneself under the microscope coolly, impartially. To see oneself as one is; and, as a corollary, to accept oneself as one is. And then? Then I could almost say: Nothing is forbidden me! Nothing, provided I don’t dupe myself; I know what I am doing and, as far as possible, why I am doing it.”

But, almost at once, a wry smile pursed his lips. “The queerest thing is that, if I look into it carefully—my life, I mean, with its famous gospel of ‘complete freedom’ that does away with good and evil—the queer thing is, my life is almost entirely devoted to ‘doing good,’ as people call it! What has it brought me to, my precious emancipation? To acting not merely just like everybody else, but, oddly enough, in the very way which according to the present code of morals sets me among the best of men! The way I behaved just now is a case in point. Can it be that, for all practical purposes and despite myself, I’ve come to kotow to the cut-and-dried morality of those around me? Philip would smile… . No, I can’t allow that our human obligation to behave as social animals should overrule our impulses as individuals. How then explain the line I took just now? It’s fantastic how little the way we think fits in with, or even influences, the way we act. For, in my heart of hearts—why quibble over it?—I think Studler’s right. The platitudes that I hurled at him carried no weight at all. It’s he that has logic on his side; that poor child’s sufferings are so much needless agony, the issue of her fight with death is a foregone conclusion, foregone and imminent, too. Well, then—the least reflection tells me that if her death can be accelerated, it’s so much the better on every count. Not only for the child, but for her mother; it’s obvious that in her present condition the sight of the baby’s lingering agony may well prove dangerous to her—as Hequét, no doubt, is well aware. And there are no two ways about it; on a purely logical view the soundness of such arguments is as plain as daylight. But isn’t it odd how mere logic seldom or never really satisfies us? I don’t say that just to condone an act of cowardice; indeed, I know quite well that what drove me to act as I did this evening, or, rather, to refuse to act, was not mere cowardice. No, it was something as urgent, as imperative as a law of nature. But what it was, that urgency—that’s what passes me.” He ran over in his mind some possible explanations. Was it one of those inchoate ideas (he was convinced that such exist) that seem to sleep below the level of our lucid thoughts, but sometimes come awake and, rising to the surface, take control of us, impel us to an act— only to sink back once more, inexplicably, into the limbo of our unknown selves? Or—to take a simpler view—why not admit that a law of herd-morality exists and it is practically impossible for a man to act as if he were an isolated unit?

He seemed to be turning in a circle, his eyes blindfolded. He tried to recall the wording of Nietzsche’s well-known dictum: that a man should not be a problem, but the solution of a problem. A self-evident axiom, he used to think, but one with which, year after year, he had found it ever harder to conform. He had already had occasion to observe that some of his decisions—the most spontaneous, as a rule; often the most important ones he made—clashed with his reasoned scheme of life; so much so, indeed, that he had sometimes wondered: “Can I be really the man I think I am?” The mere suspicion left him dazed and startled; it came like a lightning-flash that slits the shadows, leaving them the darker for its passing. But he was always quick to brush the thought aside, and now again he flouted it.

Chance befriended him. As he came into the Rue Royale a whiff of baking bread, warm as a living creature’s breath, came to his nostrils from the vent-hole of a bakery, and started off his thoughts on a new tack. Yawning, he looked about him for an open tavern; then he was suddenly impelled to go and have something to eat at Zemm’s, a little café near the Comédie Francaise which stayed open till dawn and where he sometimes dropped in at night before proceeding homewards across the river.

“Yes, it’s a queer thing,” he admitted to himself after a moment of no thoughts. “We can doubt, destroy, make a clean sweep of all our beliefs, but, whether we like it or not, there remains a solid kernel proof against every doubt, the human instinct to trust our reason. A truism of which I’ve been the living proof for the last hour or so!” .

He felt tired, disconsolate, and hunted for a reassuring formula apt to restore his peace of mind. He fell back on an easy compromise. “Conflict is the common rule, and so it has always been. What is happening in my mind just now is going on throughout the universe: the clash of life with life.”

For a while he walked on mechanically, thinking of nothing in particular. He was nearing the serried tumult of the boulevards and questing women here and there pressed on him their companionable charms; he shook them off good-humouredly.

But all the time his brain was unconsciously at work, his thoughts were crystallizing round an idea.

“I am-a living being; in other words I am always choosing between alternatives and acting accordingly. So far so good. But there my quandary begins. What is the guiding principle on which I choose and act? I’ve no idea. Is it the clear-sightedness I was thinking of just now? No, hardly that. That’s theory, not practice. My zeal for clarity has never really guided me to a decision or an act. It’s only *after* I have acted that my lucidity comes into play—to justify to me what I have done. And yet, ever since I’ve been a sentient being, I’ve felt myself directed by a kind of instinct, a driving force that leads me almost all the time to choose this and not that, to act in this way,, not in another. But—most puzzling thing of all!—I notice that all my acts follow precisely the same lines; everything takes place as if I were being controlled by an unalterable law. Exactly. But what law? I haven’t a notion! Whenever at some critical moment of my life that driving force inside me leads me to take a certain course and act in consequence, I ask myself in vain: What was the principle that guided me? It’s like running up against a wall of darkness! I feel sure of my ground, intensely alive, lawful in my occasions, so to speak—yet I’m outside the law. Lawful and lawless! Neither in the teaching of the past nor in any modern philosophy, not even in myself, can I find any satisfactory answer. I see clearly enough all the laws which I can’t endorse, but I see none to which I could submit; not -one of all the standard moral codes has ever seemed to me even approximately to fit my case, or to throw any light upon the way in which I act. Yet, all the same, I forge ahead, and at a good pace, too, without the least hesitation, and, what’s more, keeping a pretty straight course. Yes, it’s extraordinary! Driving full-steam ahead like a fast liner whose steersman’s scrapped the compass! It almost looks as if I were acting under orders. Yes, that’s exactly what I feel; my way of life is ordered. Under orders, yes; but *whose* orders? … Meanwhile I don’t complain; I’m happy. I’ve not the least wish to change; only I’d like to

know why I am as I am. It's more than simple curiosity; there's a touch of apprehension in it. Has every man alive his mystery? I wonder. And shall I ever find the key to mine? Shall I know one day what it is: my guiding principle?"

He quickened his steps. Beyond the crossroads a flashing shop-sign, Zemm's, had caught his eye, and hunger drove out thought.

So quickly did he dive into the entrance of the cafe that he stumbled over a pile of oyster-baskets that filled the passage with the sour smell of brine. The restaurant was in the basement, to which a narrow spiral staircase, picturesque and vaguely conspiratorial in appearance, gave access. At this late hour the room was full of night-birds taking their ease in a warm bath of vapour, thick with the fumes of alcohol, cigar-smoke, and odours from the kitchen, all churned up together by the whizzing fans. With its polished mahogany and green leather seats the long, low, windowless tavern had the aspect of a liner's smoking-room.

Antoine made for a corner of the room, deposited his overcoat beside him, and sat down. He felt a mood of calm well-being gaining on him. Then all at once there rose before his eyes a very different scene: the nursery, the little body bathed in sweat and vainly struggling against its unseen foe. He seemed to hear the rhythmic cadence of the swaying cradle, like a tragic footfall marking time. A spasm of horror gripped him and he shrank together.

"Supper, sir?"

"Yes. Roast beef and black bread. And some whisky in a big tumbler; iced water, please, not soda."

"Will you have some of our cheese-soup, sir?"

"Very well."

On each table stood a generous bowl of potato-chips, spangled with salt-flakes, brittle and thin as "honesty" pods, infallible thirst-producers. The zest with which he crunched the chips gave Antoine the measure of his hunger as he waited for the gruyere-soup to come; simmering and cheese-scummed, stringy and crisped with shreds of onion, it was one of Zemm's specialties.

At the cloak-room near his corner some people were calling for their coats. One of the noisy group, a girl, glanced covertly at Antoine and, as their eyes met, gave him a faint smile. Where was it he had seen that smooth, sleek face that brought to mind a Japanese print, with its etched-in eyebrows and tiny, slightly oblique eyes? He was amused by the clever way in which she had signalled to him without being noticed by the others. Why, of course, she was a model he had seen several times at Daniel de Fontanin's place—his old studio in the Rue Mazarine. It all came back to him now quite clearly: the sweltering summer afternoon, the model on her "throne"; why, he could remember even the hour it was, the lighting of the room, the model's pose—and then the emotion which had made him linger on, though he was pressed for time. His eyes followed her as she went out. What was it Daniel called her? Some name that sounded like a brand of tea. She looked back at him from the door. Yes, now he remembered how he had then been struck by the flatness of her body; an athlete's body, clean-limbed and sinewy.

While, during the last few months, he fancied himself in love with Gise, other women had hardly counted in his life. In fact, since he had broken off with Mme. Javenne—the liaison had lasted two months and all but ended in a catastrophe—he had dispensed with mistresses. Now, for a few seconds, he bitterly regretted it. He took a few sips of the whisky which had just been brought; then, lifting the lid of the soup-tureen, relished its appetizing fumes.

Just then the page-boy brought him a crumpled fragment of a music-hall programme, folded envelope-wise, in the corner of which some words were scrawled in pencil:

Zemm's tomorrow, 10 p.m.???

"Anybody waiting for an answer?" he asked with interest, but in some perplexity.

"No, sir. The lady's gone."

Antoine was determined to take no action on the assignation; all the same he slipped the note into his pocket before beginning his meal.

"What a damned fine thing life is!" he suddenly reflected as an unexpected rout of cheerful thoughts danced through his brain. "Yes, I'm in love with life!" He took a moment's thought. "And, in reality, I don't depend on anyone at all." Once more a memory of Gise flitted across his mind. Now he was sure that life itself, even if love were lacking, sufficed to make him happy. He honestly admitted to himself that when Gise had been away in England he had not felt her absence in the least. Truth to tell, had any woman ever held a large place in his life or in his happiness? Rachel? Yes. But what would have been the outcome, had not Rachel gone away? Anyhow, he had said goodbye to passions of that order once and for all. No, as he saw things now, he would no longer dare to describe his feeling towards Gise as "love." He tried to find another, apter word. "An attachment?" For a few moments yet Gise held the foreground of his thoughts and he resolved to clarify his feelings of the past few months. One thing was sure: he had imagined an ideal Gise, the mirror of his dreams, quite other than the flesh-and-blood Gise who, only this afternoon … But he declined to work out the comparison.

He took a pull of his whisky and water, tackled the roast beef, and told himself once more he was in love with life.

Life, as he saw it, was a vast, open arena into which the man of action has but to launch himself enthusiastically. By "love of life" he really meant self-love, self-confidence. Still, when he visualized his own life in particular, it presented itself as something far more definite than a wide field of action placed by some miracle at his disposal and offering an infinity of possible achievements; he saw it, rather, as a clean-cut track, a long, straight road leading infallibly towards a certain goal.

There was a familiar ring about the phrases he had just employed, but their sound was always welcome to his ears. "Thibault?" the inner voice went on. "He's thirty-two: the very age when great careers begin. What of his body? Remarkably fit; he's always in fine fettle, and strong as a cart-horse. And his mind? Quick in perception, adventurous, a pioneering intellect. His capacity for work? All but unlimited… . And comfortably off, into the bargain. All that a man can want, in fact! No vices, no bad habits, nothing to trammel his vocation… . On the crest of the wave!"

He stretched his limbs and lit a cigarette.

His vocation… . Since he was fifteen all things medical had always had a singular appeal for him. Even now it was his firm conviction that in the science of medicine we may see the fine flower of nil man's intellectual efforts in the past, the most signal reward of twenty centuries' research in every branch of knowledge, and the richest field available for human genius. It knew no limits on the speculative side, yet it was founded on the very bedrock of reality and kept in close and constant contact with humanity itself.

He had a special leaning towards its human aspect. Never would he have consented to shut himself up in a laboratory and glue his eyes upon a microscopic field; no, what most delighted him was the doctor's never-ending tussle with proteiform reality.

"What is needed," the inner voice resumed, "is that Thibault should work more on his own account and not, like Terrignier or Boistelot, let himself be hamstrung by his practice. He should find time to organize and follow up experiments, collate results, and thus evolve the outlines of a system!' For Antoine pictured for himself a career akin to those of the great masters of his profession; before he was fifty he would have a host of new discoveries to his credit and, above all, he would have laid the foundations of a system of his own, glimpses of which, vague though they were as yet, he seemed to have at certain moments. "Yes, soon, quite soon… ."

Leaping an interval of darkness, his father's death, his thoughts came out again into the cheerful sunlight of the near future. Between two puffs at his cigarette he contemplated his father's death from a new angle, without the least misgiving or distress. Rather, he saw it now as a prime condition of his long-awaited freedom, opening new horizons and favouring the swift ascension of his star. His brain teemed with new projects. "I'll have to thin out my practice at once so as to get some spare time for myself. Then I shall need an assistant for my research-work, or a secretary, why not? Not a collaborator; no, quite a youngster, someone open to ideas whom I could train, who'd do the spade-work for me. Then I could really get down to it, put everything I've got into it! And make discoveries. Yes, one day, that's certain, I'll bring off something *big!*" The ghost of a smile hovered on his lips, an upcrop of the optimistic mood that buoyed him.

He threw his cigarette away, struck by a sudden thought. "That's a queer thing, now that I think of it! The moral sense that I've cast out of my life, from which I felt only an hour ago that I'd escaped for good and all—why, here it is, all of a sudden, back again in its old place! Not skulking furtively in a dark byway of my awareness; no, on the contrary, solid and serene, and very much in evidence, standing up like a rock square in the centre of my active life—the nucleus of my professional career! No, it's no use beating about the bush; as a doctor and a scientist I've an absolutely rigid code of right and wrong and, what's more, I'm pretty certain I'll stand by it, come what may. But then—how the devil is one to fit that in with …? Oh, after all," he consoled himself, "why want to make every blessed thing 'fit in'?" And very soon he gave up the attempt, letting his thoughts grow blurred, and indolently yielding to a mood of vague well-being mingled with fatigue, a comfortable lethargy.

Two motorists had just come in and settled down at a neighbouring table, depositing their bulky overcoats on the seat beside them. The man looked about twenty-five, the girl a year or two younger. A handsome couple, slim and athletic, dark-haired both, with forthright eyes, large mouths set with an array of valiant teeth, cheeks ruddied by the cold; a perfect match in age and health, in natural elegance and social standing, they shared, presumably, the same tastes. In any case their appetites ran neck and neck, for side by side and at exactly the same speed they munched their way through a pair of sandwiches as like as like could be; then, with the selfsame gesture, drained their beer-mugs, donned their fur-coats, and, keeping step together, moved springily away. Antoine watched them with interest, so typical they seemed of the ideal couple, of cordial entente.

Just then he noticed that the room was almost empty. His eyes lit on the dial of a clock above his head, reflected in a distant mirror. "Ten past ten. No, the wrong way on. Eh? Nearly two."

Shaking off his lethargy, he rose. "A fine state I'll be in tomorrow morning!" he ruefully bethought himself.

As he went up the narrow staircase, passing the page-boy drowsing on a step, a cheerful thought flashed through his mind; so realistic was the picture it evoked that he smiled furtively. "Tomorrow, 10 p.m.

He hailed a taxi, and was home five minutes later.

On the hall-table where the evening mail awaited him a slip of paper was laid out, well in view. He recognized Léon's writing:

> They rang up from Dr. Hequét's about I a.m. The little girl is dead.

He held up the sheet between his hands for some moments, then read it over again. "One a.m.? Very soon after I left… . Studler? With the nurse looking on? No. Most decidedly, no. What then? My injection? Possibly. A minimal dose, however. Still, the pulse was so weak… ."

Once the shock had spent itself, his feeling was one of relief. Hard though the blow must be for Hequét and his wife, at least it had cut short their horrible suspense. He remembered Nicole's face in sleep. Quite soon another little one would fill the absent place between them. So life is served, and every wound heals up at last. "Still, I'm sorry for them," he thought with a tightening of the heart. "I'll look them up on my way to the hospital."

In the kitchen the cat was mewing plaintively. "She'll keep me from sleeping, damn her!" Antoine grumbled. Then suddenly he remembered her kittens and opened the door. The cat flung herself across his legs and rubbed herself against him in a frenzy of caresses, with desperate importunity. Antoine stooped over her basket; it was empty.

"You'll drown them all, of course." Yes, those had been his words. Yet that too was life—why make a distinction? By what right —?

Shrugging his shoulders, he glanced at the clock, and yawned.

"Four hours' sleep. No time for dawdling!"

Léon's note was still in his hand; he rolled it into a ball and tossed it cheerfully onto the dresser.

"And now for a good cold shower. The Thibault system: Sluice away your tiredness before you go to bed!"

# PART V
# THE YOUNGER SISTER
## I

"ANSWER: 'No!' " M. Thibault said peremptorily, without opening his eyes. He cleared his throat with the dry, rasping sound that members of the household called his "asthma cough"; his head, sunk in the pillow, hardly moved at all.

Instilled in a high chair beside a folding table, M. Chasle was just opening the morning mail, though it was well after two.

That day the one kidney which still was functioning had worked so badly and the pain had been so continuous that, throughout the forenoon, M. Thibault had not been able to receive his secretary. This had gone on till twelve o'clock, when Sister Céline had thought it best to find an excuse for making the hypodermic injection which she ordinarily deferred till much later in the day. The pain had subsided almost at once, but M. Thibault, whose sense of time was greatly impaired, had fumed and fretted at being obliged to wait till M. Chasle came back from lunch, to have his letters read to him.

"What next?" he said.

M. Chasle skimmed the contents of another letter.

"Aubry (Félicien), ex-sergeant in a Zouave regiment applies for a post as guard at the Crouy Penitentiary."

" 'Penitentiary'? Why not say 'prison' right away? Put it in the wastepaper basket. Next."

"Eh? 'Why not say "prison"?" ' M. Chasle repeated sotto voce in a puzzled tone. Then, giving up hope of understanding the remark, he settled his glasses on his nose and hastily opened another envelope.

"From the Villeneuve-Joubin Vicarage. Profound gratitude … thanks for the improvement in a boy's character. There's nothing in it."

"Nothing in it? Read it, M. Chasle."

> "Dear Sir,
>
> "My sacred calling gives me the opportunity of fulfilling a very welcome task. I am requested by one of my parishioners, Mme. Beslier, to express her profound gratitude …"

"Louder!" M. Thibault commanded.

> "… her profound gratitude for the beneficial effects his stay at Crouy has had on young Alexis. When you were so good as to allow him to enter the Oscar Thibault Institution four years ago, we had all but given up hope of making anything of the unfortunate lad. His depraved instincts, evil ways, and propensity for violence boded ill for his future. But within three years a miracle, which we owe to you, has taken place. Alexis has now been back at home nine months. His mother, sisters, neighbours, and myself, as well as M. Jules Binot, the local carpenter, who employs him as an apprentice, can all speak highly of the lad's docility, keenness for his work, and zeal in performing his religious duties.
>
> "I pray Almighty God to grant His blessings to an institution which is capable of bringing about such moral reformations, and I would express my deep respect for its illustrious Founder, in whom the spirit of charity and generous vision of a Saint Vincent de Paul are once more incarnate in our midst.
>
> "J. Rumel, P.P."

M. Thibault's eyes were still closed, but the tip of his short, pointed beard was quivering; the old man was in such a weak state that the least emotion had an overwhelming effect.

"A very fine letter, M. Chasle," he said, once he had mastered his feelings. "Don't you agree it's well worth printing in our next year's *Bulletin*? Please be good enough to refresh my memory, when the time comes. Next."

"A letter from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Prisons Department."

"What's that …?"

"No," M. Chasle amended. "It's only a circular of some kind or other. Incomprehensible."

The door opened slightly; Sister Céline sidled in.

"Must get the letters finished first," M. Thibault said gruffly.

The nurse made no protest but went to the fireplace and added another log. (She always kept a log-fire burning to counteract the odour in the sick-room, which, as she sometimes put it, making a wry face, "smelled like a hospital.") After a moment she went out.

"What next, M. Chasle?"

"The Institute of France. A meeting on the twenty-seventh."

"Speak louder. Next?"

"The Diocesan Charities. Governing Committee meetings on November 23 and 30. In December, on …"

"Send a card to the Abbé Baufremont, asking him to excuse my absence on the twenty-third. And on the thirtieth as well," he added after a moment's thought. "Note the December meetings in the engagement-book. Next."

"That's all, sir. That's to say, only a subscription form from the Parish Relief Fund. And some visiting-cards; the callers yesterday were Father Nussey, M. Ludovic Roye, Secretary of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and General Kerigan. This morning the Vice-President of the Senate called to inquire for you. And some circulars. Parish magazines. Newspapers."

The door opened again, this time inexorably. Sister Céline entered, and now she carried a steaming poultice laid out on a plate.

M. Chasle lowered his eyes and left the room—on tip-toe, to prevent his boots from squeaking.

The nurse had already begun turning back the blankets. Fomentations were her latest fad. As a matter of fact, though they reduced the pain, they had none of the hoped-for effect on the sluggish organs. Indeed, so ineffectual were they that now, notwithstanding M. Thibault's repugnance, she had no choice but to use a sound again.

Once the operation was over, he felt some physical relief, but the nurse's activities had left him in a despondent mood. It had just struck half-past three; the close of the afternoon threatened to be a gloomy one. The effects of the morphine were beginning to wear off; the five o'clock enema was not due for more than an hour. To keep her patient's mind off his troubles, the nun took it upon herself to call M. Chasle back.

The little man entered discreetly and took his seat again by the window.

He was feeling worried. When, a moment before, he met fat Clotilde in the corridor, she had whispered in his ear: "This last week the master's been going downhill fast, there's no denying it." And while M. Chasle gazed at her with startled eyes, she had added: "No, that disease he has don't let no one off."

M. Thibault lay quiet in bed, though now and then he gave a little gasp, or groaned—from sheer force of habit, for the pain had not come back yet. In fact just now he was feeling comfortable, at ease. But, always fearing that the twinges might return, he wanted to doze off, and his secretary's presence fretted him.

Lifting an eyelid, he cast a melancholy glance towards the window.

"Don't waste your time waiting here, M. Chasle. Any more work is out of the question for me today. Look at me!" He tried to raise his arm. "Yes, I'm at the end of my tether."

M. Chasle made no attempt to hide his feelings. "Already!" he exclaimed, in a tone of consternation.

Surprised, M. Thibault turned his head; there was a glint of humour in his half-closed eyes.

"Can't you see my strength is failing day by day?" he sighed. "What's the good of nursing false hopes? If one's got to die, the sooner it's over the better."

"What's that? To die!" M. Chasle wrung his hands emotionally.

M. Thibault was amusing himself.

"Yes, to die," he repeated in a gruff tone, opened both eyes suddenly, and closed them again.

Speechless with horror, M. Chasle stared at the puffy, inert face, which seemed already corpse-like. Had Clotilde been right? In that case, what about himself? The prospect of a penniless old age loomed up before him.

M. Chasle began trembling as he always did when he had to screw up his courage; soundlessly he slipped off his chair.

"There comes an hour," M. Thibault went on in a low voice—he was already on the brink of sleep—"there comes an hour when rest is all one yearns for. Death should have no terrors for a Christian."

With closed eyes he listened to the echoes of the words he had just uttered buzzing in his head. He gave a start on hearing M. Chasle's voice almost in his ear.

"That's so. Death should have no terrors." The little man was scared by his own temerity. He stammered: "Yes, indeed, for me, M—Mother's death …" He stopped short, as if his breath had failed him.

A set of false teeth, which he had only recently begun wearing, gave him difficulty in speaking. It was a prize he had won in a puzzle competition promoted by a dental institute in the South of France, the specialty of which was treatment by correspondence and the supply of dentures built to fit the wax impressions sent by their clients. As a matter of fact M. Chasle found his false teeth quite satisfactory, provided he took them out for meals and when he had a good deal to say. He had developed a technique of jerking them out of his mouth and catching them in his handkerchief, while pretending to sneeze. He did so now.

Freed from his incubus, he spoke more briskly.

"For me, too, my mother's death—would you believe it?—has no terrors. Why should I be afraid of it? Still, it's a quiet time for us just now with her away in the Home; and a quiet time, that's what makes the charm of life, even in childhood."

He paused again, trying to link up what he had said with what he had in mind.

"I don't live by myself, you know; that's why I said 'for us.' Perhaps you know it, sir? Aline has stayed on with me; she used to be Mother's servant. And Dédette, her niece, the little girl M. Antoine operated on, that famous night. Yes," he added with a smile that lit up his face with a sudden glow of tenderest affection, "the little girl's living with us; why, she even calls me 'Uncle Jules'—it's a way she's got into. What makes it so funny is that I'm not really her uncle."

The smile died from his lips and a shadow crossed his face. Then he blurted out in a rather harsh voice:

"Three mouths to feed, my word, that takes a lot of money!"

With an unwonted familiarity he had edged up quite near the bed, as if he had some pressing information to convey, but he was careful not to look M. Thibault in the face.

Taken by surprise, the invalid had not yet quite closed his eyes, and now was scrutinizing M. Chasle. The little man's remarks, for all their incoherence, seemed to be hovering round some unstated project; there was something unusual, not to say disquieting, about it all that vanquished M. Thibault's desire to be left to sleep.

Suddenly M. Chasle stepped back and fell to pacing up and down the room. His shoes were squeaking, but now he paid no heed to this.

When he spoke again there was a certain bitterness in his voice.

"What's more, the thought of my own death doesn't scare me, either. When all is said and done, that's my Maker's concern, not mine. But life's a different story. Ah, yes, I'm afraid of life, and I don't deny it. Growing old, you know." He turned on his heel and murmured: "Eh?" in a puzzled voice, before continuing. "I'd saved up ten thousand francs. I brought them one evening to the Superannuates' Home. 'Here's my mother and here's ten thousand francs. Take them!' That was the fee they charged. Things like that oughtn't to be allowed. It meant a quiet life, that's sure—but ten thousand francs … I ask you! All my savings. What about Dédette? Nothing in hand, nothing coming in. Less than nothing, as Aline's advanced me two thousand francs, her own money. For our living expenses, just to keep us afloat. Now suppose we reckon it out; the four hundred francs a month I'm getting here isn't such a great deal. Not for the three of us. The little girl, you see, she needs her bread and butter too. She's only an apprentice and doesn't earn anything as yet, so she costs money. But I ask you to believe me, sir, on my Bible oath—we're thrifty folk. Thrifty about everything, even the newspapers; nowadays we read the old ones that we'd put by." There was a quaver in his voice. "I hope you'll excuse me, sir,

if I'm lowering myself by telling you about the newspapers. But such things oughtn't to be allowed, no, they shouldn't indeed, after twenty centuries of our Christian era, not to mention all they say about our civilization."

There was a slight flutter of M. Thibault's hands, but M. Chasle could not bring himself to look towards the bed. He began speaking again.

"Suppose I stopped getting those four hundred francs, what would become of us?" Turning away towards the window, he cocked his ear as if hoping to hear "voices." Then abruptly, as though a sudden light had come to him, he exclaimed: "Why, of course! A legacy!" Almost at once he frowned. "Heaven knows, four thousand eight hundred francs, that's the very least the three of us can do on. Well, if God is just and merciful to us, He'll provide a bit of capital to yield that much. Yes, sir, He'll send us a—a little nest-egg."

He took out his pocket-handkerchief and mopped his forehead, as if he had just put forth a herculean effort.

" 'Have confidence, M. Chasle!' That's what they're always saying —the gentlemen at Saint Roch's, for instance. 'It isn't as if you didn't have a protector. *You* have nothing to fear.' Well, I'm not denying it; it's not as if I hadn't a protector. And, as for confidence, I'd be only too glad to have that too. Only I'd like to have that bit of capital first, that nest-egg."

He had halted at the bedside, but still refrained from looking towards M. Thibault. "It'd be easier to have confidence," he murmured, "if one could be *sure*. Yes, indeed, sir!"

Little by little his gaze, like a bird that is getting over its first panic, was hovering nearer the old man; lightly it skimmed the face upon the pillows, sped back and settled on the quiet brows, fluttered away again, again alighted, and finally came to rest for good, as if it had been snared, on the closed eyes. The light was failing now. When at last M. Thibault's eyelids lifted, he saw across the dusk M. Chasle's eyes riveted on his.

The surprise finally dispelled his lethargy. For a long time past he had regarded it as his duty to provide for his secretary's future by a legacy; indeed the bequest was explicitly included in his will. But it seemed to him essential that the beneficiary should be unaware of this until the will was read. M. Thibault, who thought he understood human nature, mistrusted everyone. He believed that if M. Chasle got wind of the bequest, he would cease being a punctual employee—and his generosity would defeat itself. "I think I get your meaning, M. Chasle." His tone was amiable.

A sudden flush rose to the secretary's cheeks, and he looked away.

M. Thibault pondered for some moments before continuing.

"But—how shall I put it?—isn't there more courage, in certain cases, in rejecting a suggestion such as yours, on the strength of well-established principles, than in yielding to it, without consideration, out of blindness or a false sentiment of charity—out of weakness, in a word?"

Standing at the bedside, M. Chasle nodded meekly. The tone of self-assurance in his employer's harangues always had such a compelling effect on him, and he was so used to falling in with all M. Thibault's opinions, that now as usual he was quite unable to stand up against them. Only later did it strike him that, by thus agreeing with what had just been said, he was approving the frustration of his hopes. He resigned himself at once. He was used to disappointments. How often had he made the most legitimate petitions in his prayers—and they had not been granted! But he did not rebel, for that, against Divine Providence. And M. Thibault, likewise, had come to be credited by his secretary with supreme, impenetrable wisdom, to which, as a matter of course, he bowed.

He had resigned himself to silence and assent with such finality that he decided to put back his artificial teeth. He thrust his hand into his pocket. His cheeks went scarlet. The plate was no longer there.

Meanwhile M. Thibault was placidly continuing his homily. "Don't you realize, M. Chasle, that when you handed over your savings, the fruits of honest toil, to a secular and questionable institution like that Home, you were the victim of sharp practice? For we could easily have found some religious institution where old folk are looked after free of charge, provided the applicant is penniless and backed by somebody of influence? Were I to fall in with what you seem to be requesting, and include you in the provisions of my will, isn't it obvious that, when I'm gone, you'd fall again into the clutches of some swindler who would drain you of the last sou of my bequest?"

But M. Chasle had stopped listening. He could remember having taken out his handkerchief; then, presumably, the set of false teeth had dropped on the carpet. He had a horrid vision of this all-too-revealing—possibly malodorous—appliance, in the rude hands of strangers. Craning his neck, his eyes starting out of his head, he was peering under each piece of furniture, flustered and fluttering about like a scared hen.

M. Thibault noticed him, and now was stirred to compassion. "I might increase that legacy," he thought.

Thinking it would calm his secretary's ruffled feelings, he went on in a genial tone.

"And after all, M. Chasle, isn't it a mistake we often make, comparing penury with poverty? Penury, of course, is deplorable; it's an evil counsellor, for one thing. But poverty—isn't it often a manifestation, in a disguised form, of God's grace?"

His employer's voice came in vague, fitful gusts to M. Chasle's ears, which were buzzing like those of a drowning man. He made an effort to collect his scattered wits, patted the pockets of his coat and waistcoat, thrust a despairing hand under his coat-tails. Suddenly a cry of joy all but escaped his lips. There they were, the false teeth, entangled in his bunch of keys!

M. Thibault was still discoursing on the same topic. "For a Christian, has poverty ever been incompatible with happiness? And is not the inequality of worldly goods a prime condition of social equilibrium?"

"Rather!" M. Chasle exclaimed, with a little gleeful chuckle and rubbing his hands. Then he added absent-mindedly: "That's just what makes the charm of it."

M. Thibault's energy was flagging, but he turned his eyes towards the little man, touched to find him displaying such proper sentiments, and pleased to feel himself approved of. He made a special effort to be agreeable.

"Yes, M. Chasle, I've instilled sound methods into you, and, with your careful, painstaking habits, I don't doubt that you'll always find employment." After a pause he added: "Even if I left this world before you."

The calmness with which M. Thibault contemplated the misfortunes of such as would outlive him had a sedative e ect that was contagious. Moreover, the vast relief that M. Chasle was feeling had for the time being allayed all his worries for the future. His eyes were twinkling with joy behind the glasses as he exclaimed: "Yes, sir, as far as that's concerned, you can die in peace! I can always keep my head above water, that's sure! I've got several strings to my bow, I have. Useful inventions, gadgets, as they call them, and so forth," he added with a laugh. "I have it all worked out already, my little plan. A business I'm going to start—when you're gone."

The invalid opened one eye wide; M. Chasle's involuntary thrust had struck home. "When you're gone"! What exactly did the old fool mean by that? Just as M. Thibault was about to put a question, the nurse entered and turned on the switches, flooding the room with sudden light. Like a schoolboy when the bell rings to announce the end of lessons, M. Chasle deftly swept his papers together and with little gestures of farewell slipped out.

# II

IT WAS time for M. Thibault's enema. The nurse had already whisked back the sheets and now was bustling round the bed, making the ritual gestures. M. Thibault was brooding. His mind was haunted by M. Chasle's last remark and, above all, by the tone in which he had made it. "When you're gone." In so natural, so matter-of-fact a tone! Obviously for M. Chasle it was a foregone conclusion that his employer was to "go" in the very near future. "The graceless fool!" M. Thibault muttered irritably. He was only too glad to give way to his vexation; it took his thoughts off the question hovering in the back of his mind.

The nurse had rolled up her sleeves. "Up with you!" she called out briskly.

She had no easy task. A thick layer of towels had to be built in beneath the invalid. M. Thibault was heavy and gave no assistance, merely letting himself be rolled this way and that, like a dead body. But each movement cost him a stab of pain along his legs and in the hollow of his back, and the physical pain was worsened by mental distress. Each phase of this daily ordeal was another outrage to his pride and sense of decency.

Sister Céline had developed a tactless habit of seadng herself at the foot of the bed during the period, more prolonged each day, while they waited for her ministrations to take effect. At first her nearness at such a moment had infuriated the invalid. Now he put up with it; perhaps, indeed, he preferred not being left to himself.

His eyes shut, with wrinkled brows, M. Thibault was turning over and over in his mind that nerve-racking question: Am I really in such a bad way? He opened his eyes, which by chance alighted on the bed-pan that the nurse had placed within easy reach and well in view on the chest of drawers. Huge, absurd, it loomed before him with an air of insolent expectancy. He looked away.

The nurse turned the brief respite to account by telling her beads.

"Pray for me, Sister," M. Thibault suddenly remarked in a tense whisper, more solicitous and earnest than his usual tone.

She finished the last ave, then replied: "I do, sir, indeed; several times a day."

There was a short silence, broken abruptly by M. Thibault.

"I am very ill, Sister, as you know. Very, very ill." The words caught in his throat; he sounded on the brink of tears.

She protested, with a rather forced smile. "Very ill! What an idea!"

But M. Thibault was not to be convinced. "Everyone shirks telling me the truth. But I can feel it in my bones; I shall never get well again." Noticing she did not interrupt, he added with a certain challenge in his tone: "Yes, I know that I have only a little while to live."

He was watching her. Shaking her head, she went on with the prayer.

M. Thibault became alarmed.

"I wish the Abbé Vécard to come at once," he said in a hoarse voice.

The nun merely protested: "Oh, you received Holy Communion last Saturday! There can be nothing on your conscience now."

M. Thibault made no reply. His forehead was beaded with sweat, his jaws were chattering. The enema was beginning to take effect — seconded by his fears.

"The bed-pan!" he gasped.

A minute later, in the pause between two spasms of colic, two groans, he shot an angry glance at the nun.

"I'm getting weaker," he panted, "every day. I've got to see—to see the Abbé."

She was too busy pouring hot water into the basin to notice the desperate anxiety with which he was watching her expression.

"As you like," she said evasively, then put back the kettle and tested the water with her finger. Without raising her eyes, she went on mumbling over the basin.

"… can never be too careful," was all that M. Thibault caught.

His head dropped over his breast; he gritted his teeth.

A few minutes later, after a wash and change of nightshirt, he was lying in cool, clean sheets—with nothing to do but to nurse his pain.

Sister Céline was back in her chair, still toying with her beads. The ceiling light had been put out, and the room was lit only by a low table-lamp. There was nothing to take the sufferer's mind off his apprehensions, or the neuralgic, lancinating pains which grew sharper and sharper, shooting along the posterior surface of his thighs and radiating in every direction, then becoming suddenly localized, as sharp, stabbing twinges, in definite spots on his loin, knee-caps, and ankle-joints. During the momentary lulls when the pain sank to a dull ache, the irritation of the bed-sores left him no peace.

M. Thibault opened his eyes, and stared into vacancy, while his all-too-lucid thoughts turned in the same sad circle: "What do they all really think? Can one be in danger without knowing it? How find out the truth?"

Noticing that her patient was suffering more and more pain, the nurse decided to make the nightly injection of a half-dose of morphine at an earlier hour.

M. Thibault did not see her going out. Suddenly he found he was alone, left helpless before the malignant influences hovering in the silent, darkened room, and a wild panic came over him. He tried to cry out, but just then the pain came back with unwonted violence; he tugged frantically at the bell.

It was Adrienne who rushed into the room.

He was unable to speak; only hoarse, meaningless sounds broke from his writhing lips. The sudden effort he made to draw himself up into a sitting posidon seemed to be tearing his body in two. He sank back, groaning, onto the pillow.

At last he managed to speak. "What do they mean by leaving me to die, all by myself? Where's the sister? Send for the Abbé. No, fetch Antoine. Quickly!"

Panic-stricken, the maid stared at the old man; the consternation in her eyes was the last straw.

"Go away! Fetch M. Antoine. D'you hear me? Immediately!"

The sister came back with the hypodermic syringe ready. She saw the maid rush past her out of the room, but had no idea what could have occurred. Sprawled half across the bolster, M. Thibault was paying the penalty of his excitement with a new bout of pain. As it happened, he was in a good position for the injection.

"Don't move," the sister said, uncovering his shoulder; and without more ado she pressed the needle home.

Antoine was stepping forth into the street when Adrienne caught up with him.

He ran up the stairs at once.

As he entered, M. Thibault turned his head. Antoine's presence, which in his panic he had invoked with no great hope that it could prove forthcoming, was an immediate solace. He murmured mechanically:

"Ah, so there you are!"

The injection was already beginning to take effect: he felt better. Propped on two cushions, with his arms stretched out, he was inhaling a few drops of ether which the sister had sprinkled on a handkerchief. Through the opening of the nightshirt Antoine could see the old man's emaciated neck, and his Adam's apple jutting between two stringy muscles. The nerveless immobility of the forehead was in striking contrast with the constant tremor of the heavy under-jaw. The huge cranium, the ears, and large, flat temples had something of the pachyderm about them.

"Well, Father, what is it?" Antoine smiled.

M. Thibault made no reply, but for some moments stared at his son; then he closed his eyes. He would have liked to cry: "Tell me the truth. Is everybody hoodwinking me? Am I really going to die? Speak out, Antoine—and save me!" But he was tongue-tied by the steadily increasing deference he felt towards his son, and by a superstitious dread that if he put his apprehensions into words he would suddenly give them an inexorable reality.

Antoine's eyes met the sister's gaze, which led them towards the table where the thermometer was lying. He went up to it and saw it read 102. The sudden rise puzzled him; till now there had been practically no fever. Going back to the bed, he took his father's pulse, more to tranquillize the patient than for any diagnostic reason.

"The pulse is good," he said almost at once. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong? I'm suffering the torments of the damned!" M. Thibault exclaimed. "I've been in pain all day. I—I nearly died. Isn't that so?" He shot an imperious glance at the nurse. Then his tone changed and a look of fear came into his eyes. "You mustn't leave me, Antoine. I'm so nervous, you know. I'm afraid it may start again."

Antoine's compassion was aroused. As it happened, there was no urgent reason for him to go out. He promised to stay with his father till dinner-time.

"I had an appointment," he said, "but I'll ring up and call it off."

Sister Céline followed him to the study, where the telephone was installed.

"What sort of day did he have?"

"Not too good. I had to make the first injection at noon, and I've just given him another. A half-dose," she added. "But the real trouble's his state of mind. He has such terrible ideas. 'Everyone's lying to me,' he says. 'I want to see the Abbé, I'm going to die,' and heaven knows what else."

Antoine's troubled eyes seemed asking a specific question: "Do you think it possible that he suspects …?" The nun, no longer daring to say no, merely nodded.

Antoine thought it over. That was not enough to explain the temperature, in his opinion.

"What we've got to do" —he made an emphatic gesture— "is to root out immediately the least trace of suspicion from his mind." There flashed across his mind a method, fantastically rash, but drastic; he kept it to himself. "The first thing," he continued, "is to make sure that he has a calm evening. Please have another eighth of a grain of morphine ready to give him when I tell you."

He re-entered the bedroom with a cheerful exclamation. "I've fixed it! I'm free till seven." His voice had its incisive ring, and his face the tense, determined look he wore at the hospital. Now, however, he was smiling.

"There was the devil to pay! When I rang up the house where the little girl is ill, her grandmother answered. The poor old thing was dreadfully upset. She kept on wailing down the phone: 'What? You can't mean it, doctor? Won't you be coming this evening?' " He suddenly assumed an air of consternation. " 'I'm so sorry, but I've just been called to the bedside of my father, who is dangerously ill.' " (M. Thibault's face grew tense.) "But a woman isn't put off so easily. She said: 'I had no idea! What's he suffering from?' "

Carried away by his temerity, Antoine scarcely hesitated a moment before taking the last, fantastic plunge.

"What was I to say? Guess! I said to her, cool as a cucumber: 'My father, Madame, if you want to know, has a …a prostatic cancer!' " He added with a nervous laugh: "After all, why not? While I was about it."

He saw the nurse's arm (she was pouring water into a tumbler) go rigid. And suddenly he realized that he was playing with fire; almost he lost his nerve. But it was too late to draw back now.

He burst out laughing.

"But that lie, Father, I set down to your account, you know."

On the bed M. Thibault seemed to be listening with every fibre of his being. His body was taut; only the hand on the counterpane was trembling. Never could the most precise denials have swept away his fears so utterly. Antoine's diabolical audacity had, with one deft stroke, laid low the phantoms of his mind, and brought the sick man back to hope and confidence. Opening both eyes, he looked at his son, and could not bring himself, it seemed, to drop the lids again. A new emotion, a warm glow of affection, was quickening in the old man's heart. He tried to speak, but a sort of dizziness came over him, and at last, after a brief smile of which the young man caught a fleeting glimpse, he shut his eyes once more. . Any man other than Antoine in a like case would have mopped his brow, murmuring perhaps: "Ouf! That was a close shave!" But Antoine, only a trifle paler than before and well pleased with himself, was thinking merely: "The main thing for stunts like that is to make up one's mind, definitely, to bring them off."

Some minutes passed. Antoine would not meet the sister's eyes. M. Thibault's arm moved; then he spoke, as if continuing a discussion.

"In that case, will you explain why I've more and more pain? It looks almost as if the drugs you're pumping into me made it more acute, instead of …"

"Of course," Antoine broke in. "Of course they make it more acute; that's what shows they're taking effect."

"Really?"

M. Thibault asked nothing better than to let himself be convinced. And, as in point of fact the afternoon had not been quite so trying as he made out, he felt almost sorry that his sufferings had not lasted longer.

"What do you feel just now?" Antoine asked. The rise in his father's temperature worried him.

If M. Thibault had been frank, he would have replied: "I'm feeling extremely comfortable." Instead he muttered: "I've a pain in my legs, and a dull ache in the small of my back."

"I passed a sound at three," Sister Céline put in.

"And a sort of weight, a feeling of oppression, here …"

Antoine nodded. "Yes, it's rather curious," he began, turning to the sister. He had no idea this time what new story he was going to concoct. "I'm thinking of certain—certain phenomena I've observed in connexion with changes of treatment. Thus in skin diseases, we often get unlooked-for results by using different treatments alternately. I dare say Thérivier and I were wrong in deciding to use so continuously this serum, Number—er—17.

"Most certainly you were wrong." M. Thibault spoke with firm conviction.

Good-humouredly Antoine broke in. "But that's your fault, Father. You're in such a hurry to get well. We've been forcing the pace, that's it." Turning to the sister, he addressed her with the utmost gravity. "Where did you put the ampoules I brought yesterday—the D 92, you know?"

She made an awkward gesture; not because she had the least objection to mystifying a patient, but because she had some difficulty in finding her way about amongst all the new "serums" Antoine kept on inventing whenever the occasion arose.

"Please make an injection immediately with D 92. I want it made before the effects of Number 17 have worn off. I'd like to see how the mixture affects the blood."

M. Thibault had noticed the nurse's hesitant air, and his glance in her direction had not escaped Antoine. To cut short any suspicion that might have been aroused, he added:

"I'm afraid you'll find this injection a bit more painful, Father. D 92 is less fluid than the others. But that's only a moment's discomfort. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, you'll feel very much relieved tonight."

Antoine said to himself: "I'm getting smarter at this sort of thing every day," and noted it with satisfaction, as a sign of his professional progress. Moreover, in the macabre game he was playing, there was not only a constant element of difficulty but a spice of risk, which, Antoine had to own, appealed to him.

The sister came back.

M. Thibault submitted to the injection with a certain nervousness; before the needle had even touched his skin, he began to whimper.

"Most painful, this new stuff of yours," he muttered, when it was over. "Much thicker than the other. Like liquid fire under the skin. And it has a smell—don't you notice? The other, anyhow, was scentless."

Antoine had sat down. He made no reply. There was not the faintest difference between this last injection and the one before it; the ampoules came out of the same box, the needle and the hand that used it were identical. Only—it was supposed to have a different label. Yes, he thought, one has only to set the mind off on a wrong track, and all the senses "play up" to the delusion. What feeble instruments, those senses or ours, which we fancy infallible! And what of that childish craving we all have, to humour our intellect at all costs? Even for a sick man the tragedy of tragedies is not to "understand." Once we have managed to give a name to what is happening and assign to it a plausible cause, once our poor brain contrives to link up two ideas with a show of logic, we're pleased as Punch. "And yet," Antoine murmured, "surely intelligence is the one fixed point in the eternal flux. Without it, where'd we be?"

M. Thibault had closed his eyes again.

Antoine signed to Sister Céline to leave the room. They had noticed that the patient was apt to be more fretful when they were together at his bedside.

Though Antoine had been seeing his father daily, he was struck now by the change in his appearance. The skin had an amber translucence, and a peculiar gloss that augured ill. The face was puffier than ever, and flabby pouches had formed under the eyes. The nose, however, had shrunk to a long, lean ridge, which oddly changed the whole expression of the face.

The old man made a movement. Little by little his features were growing animated, losing their moroseness. And between the eyelids, which parted more and more frequently, the dilated pupils had an unwonted brilliance.

"The double injection is taking effect," Antoine thought. "In a few moments he'll be getting talkative!"

M. Thibault was experiencing a sort of general relaxation and a desire for repose, all the more agreeable for being unaccompanied by any sense of weariness. Nevertheless, his thoughts still turned on his death; only, now that he no longer believed in it, he found it possible, not to say pleasant, to discourse about it. What with the added stimulus of the morphine, he was unable to resist the temptation of staging, for his own benefit and his son's, the edifying spectacle of a Christian deathbed.

"Listen to me, Antoine!" he said abruptly, in a solemn tone. Then, without more preamble, he began: "In the will that you find after my death …" He made a slight pause, like an actor waiting for a cue.

Good-humouredly Antoine played his part. "Really, Father," he exclaimed, "I didn't know you were in such a hurry to see the last of us!" He laughed. "Why, only a moment ago I was pointing out how eager you were to get back into harness again."

Satisfied, the old man raised a monitory hand.

"Let me speak, my boy. It is possible that, on the strictly scientific view, my life is not in danger. But within myself I know …I have a feeling that …In any case, death … The good—alas, so little!—that I have tried to do in this world will be set down to my account. And, if the day has come when …" He cast a fleeting glance at Antoine to make sure the incredulous smile was still on his lips. "Well, we must not lose heart. God's mercy is infinite."

Antoine listened in silence.

"But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. At the end of my will, you'll find a list of bequests. Old servants. I'd specially like to draw your attention to that codicil, my boy. It's several years old now. Perhaps I haven't been quite … quite generous enough.

I'm thinking of M. Chasle. That worthy man owes much to me, I grant you. Indeed he owes everything to me. But that's no reason why his … his devotion should not be rewarded, even if the reward's … superfluous."

His remarks were frequently interrupted by coughing, which obliged him to stop and take breath. "It looks as if the disease is rapidly becoming generalized," Antoine thought. "That cough is getting worse, so is the nausea. The tumour must be invading other parts of the body. The lungs and stomach are involved. His vitality's at the mercy of the first complication, that may arise."

"I have always," continued M. Thibault, whom the drug was rendering at once more lucid and more incoherent, "I have always been proud of belonging to that prosperous middle class which in all ages has been the mainstay of my country and my Church. But, my boy, that relative affluence imposes certain duties." Again his thoughts took a new turn. "You, Antoine, have a most regrettable tendency; you're much too self-centered." He spoke abrupty, casting an angry look at his son. "But you'll change when you grow up." He corrected himself. "When you're older and, like me, have founded a family. A family," he repeated. The word "family," which he always spoke with a certain emphasis, called forth a host of vagrant echoes in his mind, fragments of speeches he had made in former-days. Once more he dropped the thread of his thoughts. His voice grew orotund. "Undoubtedly, my boy, once we grant that the family must be regarded as the germ-cell of the social organism, is not its proper function to build up that … that plebeian aristocracy from which the leaders of the nation will henceforth be recruited? Ah, the Family! I ask you, are we not the pivot on which turn the middle-class democracies of today?"

"Why, of course, Father; I quite agree with you," Antoine said gently.

The old man seemed not to hear him. Gradually his tone was becoming less pompous, and his real meaning easier to grasp.

"You'll grow out of it, my boy. I'm positive of that, and so's the Abbé. You'll get over certain views of life, and my prayer is that the change of heart may come quite soon. Ah, Antoine, how I wish that change had come already! When I am about to leave this world, isn't it a bitter thought that my son …? Brought up as you were, living under this roof, should you not have …? Some religious zeal, in short. A faith that's more robust, more loyal to its duties."

Antoine was thinking: "If he had the least idea of what my 'faith' amounts to!"

"Who knows," M. Thibault sighed, "if God will not set it down against me? Ah, if only that dear, departed saint, your mother, had not been taken from us so soon, had been spared to help me in that Christian duty!"

Tears were welling up between his eyelids; Antoine watched them brim over and trickle down the old cheeks. He had not expected this, and could not help being stirred by emotion, which increased when he heard his father's next remark. M. Thibault began speaking in a confidential, almost urgent undertone that Antoine had not heard before; and he now was perfectly coherent.

"I have other accounts to render to my Maker. For Jacques's death. Poor lad! Did I do all I should have done for the boy? I wanted to be firm; I was hard. Yes, I accuse myself before the judgment seat of having been hard towards my son. I never managed to win his trust. Nor yours, Antoine. No, don't protest; that's the truth. It was God's will to withhold from me my children's trust. My two sons! They've respected me, feared me; but from their youth up, they've kept aloof from me. Pride! Mine, and theirs… . And yet, did I not do my whole duty by them? Didn't I make them over to the Church from their early years? Didn't I take the utmost care of their education? Ingratitude! O Father in heaven, judge if the fault was mine. Jacques was always up in arms against me. And yet …! How could I possibly give my consent to that … to such a thing? How could I?"

He was silent for a moment, then suddenly exclaimed: "Go away, shameless son!"

Antoine stared at his father in bewilderment. The words were obviously not addressed to him. Was the old man getting delirious? His jaws were set, his forehead clammy with sweat; he was waving his arms as if bereft of reason.

"Go away!" he said again. "Have you forgotten all you owe to your father, to his name and rank? Are they nothing to you—the family honour, your soul's salvation? There are certain acts which— which take effect beyond ourselves, which imperil all traditions. I'll— I'll break you! Go away!" Fits of coughing cut across the phrases. He took a deep breath. His voice sank lower still. "O Lord, I am not assured of Thy forgiveness… . 'What did you make of your son?' "

Antoine broke in. "Father …!"

"Alas, I failed to shield him. Evil influences. The plotting of those Huguenots… ."

Antoine thought: "Ah, the Huguenots again!" No one had ever discovered the origin of the old man's fixed idea about the "Huguenots." Antoine's theory was that shortly after Jacques's disappearance, while the inquiries were still in progress, thanks to some indiscretion, M. Thibault had discovered that throughout the previous summer Jacques had been seeing a great deal of the Fontanins, at Maisons-Laffitte. From that moment there had been no way of shaking the old Catholic's obsession; blinded by his aversion for all Protestants, harking back presumably to memories of Jacques's escapade to Marseille in Daniel's company, and perhaps confounding the present with the past, he had never ceased to hold the Fontanins wholly responsible for his son's disappearance.

"Where are you going?" he shouted, trying to raise himself on the pillow.

Then he opened his eyes, and seemed to take heart when, through his tears, he saw Antoine beside him.

"Poor lad!" he murmured brokenly. "Those Huguenots lured him away. Yes, they stole him from us, my boy. It's all their fault. They drove him to suicide."

"Oh, come, Father!" Antoine exclaimed. "Why do you persist in imagining that he …?"

"He killed himself. He went away; he went off and killed himself." Antoine seemed to hear a faint whisper, "My curse"; but the words were meaningless; he concluded he had been mistaken. The rest of the phrase was stifled by weak, heartrending sobs, which gave place to a fit of coughing that died down almost at once.

Antoine had an impression that his father was falling asleep, and was careful not to make a sound.

Some silent minutes passed.

"Antoine!"

Antoine gave a start.

"That boy, Aunt Marie's son—do you remember Aunt Marie who lived at Quilleboeuf? No, of course you can't have known her. Well, he—he did the same thing. I was a youngster when it happened. With his shotgun one evening; he'd been out shooting. They never learned …"

In a half-dream, his mind adrift on a flood of memories, M. Thibault was smiling to himself.

"How she used to rile Mamma with her songs—she was always singing! What was that song now? About the 'pretty pony,' 'clinkety-clankety' something. During the summer vacation, at Quillebceuf. You didn't know old Niqueux's rickety wagon, of course. Ha! Ha! Ha! That time the servants' luggage tumbled off it. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Antoine rose abruptly; his father's merriment was even more painful than his sobs. During the past few weeks M. Thibault had often shown a tendency, especially after the injections, to hark back to trivial details of bygone days. In the old brain, half emptied now of memories, these details took on an amplitude, like murmurs in a hollow shell. Then for days on end he would con them over and over, laughing to himself like a baby.

Turning cheerfully to Antoine, he began. singing in a soft, almost childish voice:

"I have a pretty pony,
And her name is … something trot,
And I wouldn't give my pony
For all the—yes—all the gold you've got.
So clinkety and clankety . . ."

"There!" he exclaimed petulantly. "I've gone and forgotten the rest. Mademoiselle knows that song, too, quite well. She used to sing it when Gise was little."

He had ceased thinking of Jacques's death, and of his own. And indefatigably, till Antoine left, he delved into his memories of Quilleboeuf, trying to piece together the old nursery song.

# III

ALONE now with Sister Céline, M. Thibault had recovered his solemnity. He bade her bring his soup, and submitted, without a word, to being spoon-fed. After they had said the evening prayer together, he had her turn off the ceiling light.

"Sister, will you be kind enough to ask Mademoiselle to come? And send for the servants, please; I wish to speak to them."

Though put out at being disturbed at such an hour, Mile, de Waize hobbled across to the bedroom at once and halted, out of breath, just inside the door. In vain she tried to raise her eyes towards the bed; her bent back made it impossible for her to see above the chair-legs and, in the zone of lamplight, the mended places in the carpet. When the nun brought up a chair for her, Mademoiselle recoiled in horror. She would rather have stayed like a water-fowl perched on one leg for ten consecutive hours than let her skirts come in contact with that germ-infested chair.

Ill at ease, the two maids kept as near each other as they could, two dark forms lit up, now and again, by the flickering firelight.

M. Thibault meditated for some moments. His conversation with Antoine had not been enough; he was torn by an irresistible desire to round off the evening with another dramatic scene.

"I feel"—he gave a slight cough—"I feel that my last hour is rapidly approaching, and I desire to take advantage of a brief respite from my pain, the cruel sufferings that are imposed on me, to bid you farewell."

The sister, who was busy folding towels, stopped short in amazement; Mademoiselle and the two servants were too startled to say a word. For a moment M. Thibault fancied that the announcement of his death came as a surprise to no one, and a hideous fear gripped his heart. Fortunately, the sister had more presence of mind than the others, and exclaimed: "But, M. Thibault, you're getting better every day! How can you talk about dying? What would the doctor say if he heard?"

At once M. Thibault felt his moral courage revive; and, frowning, made a feeble gesture, to impose silence on the babbler.

Then like a man reciting a set speech, he continued.

"On the eve of my appearance before the judgment seat of Heaven, I ask to be forgiven, forgiven by all. Too often I have lacked indulgence for others; I have been harsh, and perhaps wounded the feelings of my … of those who live under my roof. Now I acknowledge my … my debts … the debts I owe to all of you. To you, Clotilde and Adrienne, and, above all, to your good mother who is now confined to a bed of suffering, as I am. And lastly, to you, Mademoiselle, you who gave up …"

At this point Adrienne burst into tears so copious that M. Thibault all but broke down himself. He gulped a sob down, hiccuped; then, recovering his self-control, proceeded:

"… you who abandoned a quiet, unpretentious existence, to come and take your place in our bereaved home and … and tend the sacred flame, the flame of our family life. Who was there better qualified than you to … to look after the children, whose dear mother you had brought up from her earliest days?"

Whenever he halted to take breath, the women's sobs could be heard in the dark background. The little spinster's back was more hunched than ever, her head bobbed up and down, and in the pauses a faint sucking sound came from her quivering lips.

"We owe it to you, and to your constant care, that the family has been enabled to follow its appointed course, under the eye of Heaven. For this I thank you, Mademoiselle, in public; and it is to you, Mademoiselle, that I address a final request. When that last, dread moment comes …" The effect of the words was so devastating that to master his brief panic M. Thibault paused and took stock of his present state, the comfortable afterglow of the morphine injection, before continuing. "When the dread moment comes, I would ask you, Mademoiselle, to say aloud that noble prayer—you know the one I mean—the 'Litany for a Happy Death,' which I read with you at the deathbed of my … my poor wife, in this same room—do you remember?—under that crucifix."

His dim eyes strove to pierce the shadows. Of the bedroom furniture, mahogany upholstered in blue rep, nothing had been changed. In this selfsame setting years ago, at Rouen, he had seen his parents die. Then, in his youth, he had brought it with him to Paris, and later, it had furnished the bedroom he had shared with his wife. In this bed Antoine had been born one cold March night, and nine years later, on another winter's night, his wife had died in it, bringing Jacques into the world. A picture formed before his eyes of the white, wasted form laid out on the huge, violet-strewn bed.

His voice shook with emotion as he went on:

"And I trust that my dearly loved wife, that saintly soul, will befriend me when I meet my Maker … will inspire me with her courage, her resignation … yes, the courage she displayed in her last hour." He closed his eyes, and with an awkward effort folded his hands. He seemed asleep.

Sister Céline signed to the maids to leave the room as quietly as possible. Before leaving their master, they gazed earnestly at his face, as if already taking their last leave of a body laid out for burial. The sound of Adrienne's sobs and Clotilde's subdued, flustered chatter—she had given the old lady an arm—receded down the corridor. At a loss where to turn, the three women with one accord took refuge in the kitchen, round the table. All were weeping. Clotilde decreed that none of them must go to bed, so as to be ready to go and fetch a priest at a moment's notice. No sooner had she spoken than she began grinding coffee.

The nun was alone in knowing how things really were; she was used to such scenes. In her view, the serenity of a dying man was always a proof that deep within his heart he believed—often enough quite wrongly—that his life was in no immediate danger. So now, after tidying the room and banking up the fire, she opened the folding bed on which she slept. Ten minutes later, without having exchanged a word with her patient, the nurse slipped tranquilly from prayer to sleep, as she did each night.

M. Thibault, however, had not fallen asleep. The double dose of morphine, while continuing its anodyne effect, was keeping him awake, in a voluptuous lethargy peopled with a host of schemes and fancies. The act of spreading panic around him seemed to have definitively cast out of his mind his own alarms. True, the heavy breathing of the sleeping nurse was rather irritating, but he consoled himself by picturing the day when he would dismiss her with a word of thanks —and a handsome donation to her Order. How much?

Well, that could be settled afterwards … very soon. He was fretting with impatience for a return to active life. What was becoming of his charitable societies now he could not attend to them?

A log collapsed into the embers, and he half opened a sleepy eye. A little, vacillating flame set the shadows dancing on the ceiling. And suddenly with his mind's eye he saw himself, a lighted candle in his hand, groping his way along the corridor of Aunt Marie's house at Quillebceuf, that musty old corridor which smelt year in year out of apples and saltpetre. There, too, great shadows had suddenly loomed before him and gone dancing up across the ceiling. And he remembered the terrifying black spiders that always lurked at night in the dark corners of the closet. In his mind just now there was so little difference between the timorous boy of many years ago and the old man of today that it cost him an effort to distinguish between them.

The clock struck ten. Then the half-hour … Quillebceuf. The rickety old wagon. The poultry-yard. Léontine …

All this jetsam of the past, which a chance play of light had stirred in the abyss of memory, kept floating up to the surface of his mind, refused to be thrust down again into the depths. And like a desultory burden to these evocations of his childhood, the tune of the old nursery song ran in his head. He could as yet recall hardly any of the words, except the first few lines, which he had gradually pieced together, and part of the refrain which had unexpectedly flashed up across the twilight of his thoughts.

"I have a little pony
And her name is Trilbytrot,
And I would not give my pony
For all the gold you've got.
So clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go …"

The clock struck eleven.

"I have a little pony
And her name is Trilbytrot …"

# IV

AT ABOUT four on the following day, it happened that the journey from one professional call to another took Antoine so near home that he dropped in to hear the latest news. That morning his father had seemed to him considerably weaker; the fever showed no sign of abating. He wondered if some new complication was setting in; or was it merely symptomatic of the general progress of the disease?

Antoine did not want to be seen by the invalid, who might have been alarmed by this unexpected visit, and therefore entered the dressing-room directly from the hall.

There he found Sister Céline, who reassured him in an undertone. So far the patient had had a fairly good day. For the moment M. Thibault was under the influence of a morphine injection. These repeated doses of the drug were becoming imperative, to enable him to bear the pain.

The door leading into the bedroom was not completely closed and a vague murmur, a sound of singing, could be heard. Antoine listened. The nurse shrugged her shoulders.

"He went on at me till I had to go and fetch Mademoiselle; he wanted her to sing him some old song or other. It's been running in his head all day; he can't talk of anything else."

Antoine tip-toed to the door. The little old lady's quavering voice floated to him across the silence.

"I have a pretty pony
And her name is Trilbytrot,
And I would not give my pony
For all the gold you've got,
When clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go
To where my lovely Lola
Is waiting for me now."

Then Antoine heard his father's voice like a wheezy bagpipe taking up the refrain.

"When clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go …"

The quavering soprano broke in again.

"I'll cull me yonder floweret
While Trilby browses near,
The fairest, rarest floweret
To deck my dark-eyed dear."

"That's it!" M. Thibault broke in triumphantly. "We have it! Aunt Marie could never get that right. She used to sing: 'La-la-la-la, my dear!' No words. 'La-la-la-la!' "

They joined in the chorus together.

"Then clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we'll go
To where my lovely Lola
Is waiting for me now."

"Anyhow, he doesn't complain while he's at it," the sister whispered.

Sad at heart, Antoine left the room.

As he was going out into the street, the concierge called to him from her doorstep. The postman had just delivered some letters for him. Antoine took them absent-mindedly. His thoughts were still on what was happening upstairs.

"Then clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go …"

He was amazed to find himself so distressed by his father's illness. When, a year earlier, he had realized that there was no hope of saving the old man, he had detected in himself a puzzling but indubitable affection for the father whom, as he had thought till now, he had never loved. It came to him then as a new-born impulse, and yet it somehow had the semblance of a very old, latent affection, which the approach of the irreparable had merely fanned to sudden flame. Moreover, as the malady dragged its course, natural emotion had been implemented by professional instinct; he felt a special interest in this patient, of whose death-sentence he alone was aware and whose last months it was his task to make as bearable as could be.

Antoine had begun walking down the street when his eyes fell on one of the letters in his hand. He stopped short.

M. Jacques Thibault
4A Rue de l'Université

Now and again a stray pamphlet or bookseller's catalogue addressed to Jacques still came in; a letter was quite another matter… . The envelope was pale blue, the address was written in a tall, flowing, faintly supercilious hand, whether a man's or a woman's was hard to say. Antoine turned back. This needed thinking over. He shut himself up in his office. But before even sitting down, he had boldly, unhesitatingly, opened the envelope.

The very first words came as a shock.

IA Place du Pantheon,
November 25, 1913.

Dear Sir,
I have read your short story …

"A short story! So Jacques is a writer?" he murmured. Then, triumphantly: "He's alive. This proves it!" The words danced before his eyes. Feverishly he ran his eyes down the page, looking for the signature—"Jalicourt."

I have read your short story with the keenest interest. Of course you do not expect an elderly "don" like myself …

Jalicourt! Antoine thought. Yes, it's Valdieu de Jalicourt, the professor, Member of the Academy and so forth. Antoine knew him well, by repute; in fact he had two or three books by Jalicourt on his shelves.

… to give it an unqualified approval; obviously the classical traditions in which my mind is moulded, not to say most of my personal preferences, run counter to the romantic technique you employ. I cannot wholeheartedly commend either the manner or the matter of your tale. But I must own that, even in its extravagances, this work is stamped by the creative impulse and a knowledge of human nature. Reading your story, I was several times reminded of a remark made by a great composer, a friend of mine, to whom a young musician—one, I imagine, of your clan—showed an experimental work of the most provocative audacity: "Take it away at once, sir; I might get to like it!"

Jalicourt.

Antoine was trembling with excitement. He sat down, unable to take his eyes off the letter lying open before him on the desk. Not that it came as any great surprise to learn his brother was alive; he had seen no reason to suppose Jacques had killed himself. The first effect the coming of this letter had had on him was to arouse his hunting instinct; three years earlier he had played the sleuth for months on end, following up each clue that seemed to lead towards the fugitive. And now, with the revival of his detective zeal, came a rush of such affection and so intense a longing to see Jacques again that he felt almost dizzy. Often lately—indeed, that very morning—he had had to fight down a feeling of resentment at being left alone to bear the brunt of his father's illness; so crushing was the burden that he could not help feeling aggrieved with the runaway brother who was deserting his post at such an hour.

This letter changed everything. Now it looked as if he could get in touch with Jacques, tell him what was happening, bring him back— and no longer stand alone.

He glanced at the address on the letter, then at the clock, then at his engagement-book.

"Right!" he murmured. "I've three more appointments this afternoon. Can't miss that one at half-past four, in the Avenue de Saxe; it's urgent. Must look up, too, those people in the Rue d'Artois, that scarlet fever case just starting; no time fixed, however. Number three: the child's getting better; that can wait." He rose. "Yes, I'll go to the Avenue de Saxe first, and see Jalicourt immediately after."

Antoine was in the Place du Pantheon soon after five. It was an old house without an elevator. Anyway, he was feeling too impatient just then to waste time with elevators. He raced up the stairs.

"M. Jalicourt is out. It's Wednesday. He has his lecture at the Ecole Normale from five to six."

"Keep cool now!" Antoine admonished himself as he went down the stairs. "There's just time to see that scarlet fever case."

At exactly six he alighted briskly from his taxi, outside the Ecole Normale.

He recalled his visit to the principal just after his brother's disappearance; then, that already distant summer day when he had come to this same grim-looking building with Jacques and Daniel, to learn the results of the entrance examination.

"The lecture isn't over yet. You'd better go up to the second floor. You'll see the students coming out."

An incessant draught whistled through the courtyards, up the staircases, along the corridors. Few and far between, the electric lights had the dull glow of oil-lamps. Flagstones, arcades, and banging doors, an enormous, dark, dilapidated staircase along which, on the dingy walls, tattered notices flapped in the autumn wind—the whole place with its air of general decay, its silence and solemnity, gave the impression of some provincial bishop's-palace left mouldering for eternity.

Some minutes slowly passed, while Antoine waited outside the lecture-room. Soft footsteps sounded on the flags; a hirsute, down-at-heel student carrying a bottle of wine came down the corridor, giving Antoine a keen glance as he moved by in slippers. Silence again. Then a confused buzz which, when the door of the lecture-room was flung open, rose to the hullabaloo of a parliamentary session. Laughing, shouting to each other, the students came flocking out and rapidly dispersed along the corridors.

Antoine waited. Presumably the professor would be the last to leave. Only when the hive seemed to have disgorged its last inmate, did he enter. The room was large and badly lighted, panelled with wood and flanked with busts. At the far end, he saw a tall, drooping figure; an elderly white-haired man was lethargically arranging sheets of foolscap on a table. Obviously Professor Jalicourt.

Jalicourt had fancied himself alone; on hearing Antoine's footsteps he looked up with a frown. To see in front of him he had to turn his head to one side; he was blind in one eye and on the other wore a monocle thick as a magnifying glass. When he saw he had a visitor, he moved forward a little and with a courteous gesture signed to Antoine to approach.

Antoine had expected to encounter a venerable don of the old school. This well-set-up man in a light suit, who looked more as if he had just dismounted from a horse than stepped down from a lecture platform, took him by surprise.

He introduced himself. "I'm the son of Oscar Thibault, your colleague at the Institute, and the brother of Jacques Thibault, to whom you wrote yesterday." As Jalicourt made no sign and continued observing him, affable but aloof, with lifted eyebrows, Antoine went straight to the point. "Can you give me any news, sir, of my brother Jacques? Where is he now?"

Jalicourt made no answer, but his forehead puckered, as if he had taken offence.

"I must explain, sir," Antoine hastened to add. "I took the liberty of opening your letter. My brother has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, he left home three years ago."

Jalicourt thrust his head forward abruptly and with his keen, shortsighted eye scrutinized the young man at close range. Antoine felt his breath fanning his cheek.

"Yes, three years ago," he repeated. "He gave no reason for leaving us. Since then he hasn't communicated with his father or myself. Nor with anyone—except with you, professor. So you'll understand why I've rushed to see you like this. We didn't even know if he was still alive."

"Alive he certainly is—as he has just had this story published."

"When? Where?"

Jalicourt did not reply. His clean-shaven, pointed chin, cleft by a deep furrow, jutted with a certain arrogance between the high peaks of his collar. The slender fingers were toying with the drooping tips of his long, silky, snow-white moustache. When he spoke, his voice was low, evasive.

"After all, I can't be sure. The story wasn't signed 'Thibault'; but with a pen name—which I believed I could identify as his."

The disappointment was a cruel blow to Antoine. "What was the pen name?" he asked in an unsteady tone.

Jalicourt, his one eye still intent on Antoine, seemed somewhat touched by his anxiety.

"But, M. Thibault," he said firmly, "I do not think I was mistaken."

He was obviously on the defensive; not from any exaggerated fear of taking responsibility, but because he had an instinctive aversion to meddling in the private affairs of others, to anything resembling an indiscretion. Realizing that he had to overcome a certain mistrust, Antoine hastened to explain the situation.

"What makes it so urgent is that my father has been suffering from an incurable disease for a year, and his state is getting rapidly worse. The end will come in a few weeks. Jacques and I are the only children. So you understand, don't you, why I opened your letter? I know Jacques well enough to be sure that if he is alive and I can get at him, and tell him what is happening, he'll come home."

Jalicourt pondered for a moment. His face was twitching. Then, with a quick, impulsive gesture he held out his hand.

"That puts a new complexion on it," he said. "In that case I'll be only too glad to help you." He seemed to hesitate, and glanced round the lecture-room. "We can't talk here. Would you mind coming with me to my place, M. Thibault?"

Quickly, without a word, they made their way across the huge, draughty building. When they came out into the quiet Rue d'Ulm, Jalicourt began speaking, in a friendly tone.

"Yes, I'll be glad to help. The pen name struck me as pretty obvious: 'Jack Baulthy.' Don't you agree? I recognized the writing, too; your brother had written to me once before. I'll tell you the little I know. But tell me first, why did he run away like that?"

"Why, indeed? I've never been able to find a plausible reason for it. My brother has an impulsive, ill-balanced nature; there's something of the mystic in him. All his acts are more or less erratic. Sometimes one fancies one has got to know him; then the next day he's quite different from what he was the day before. I may as well tell you, M. de Jalicourt, that Jacques ran away from home once before, when he was fourteen. He induced a school-friend to go with him; they were found three days later on the Toulon road. To the medical profession—I'm a doctor, by the way—this type of escapade has long been familiar; it has a morbid origin and its characteristics have been diagnosed. It's just possible that Jacques's first escapade was of a pathological order. But how can we account for an absence lasting three years? We've not found anything in his life that could justify such an act. He seemed happy, he had had a quiet summer vacation with his family. He had done brilliantly in the exam for the Ecole Normale, and was due to enter it at the beginning of November. The act can't have been premeditated; he took hardly any of his things with him, little or no money, only some manuscripts. He hadn't let any of his friends know of his project. But he sent a letter to the principal, resigning from the Ecole; I've seen the letter, it bears the date on which he left us. Just then I happened to be away from home for a couple of days; Jacques left during my absence."

"But—hadn't your brother some reluctance about entering the Ecole?" Jalicourt suggested.

"Do you think so?"

Jalicourt did not continue, and Antoine put no further question.

Never could he recall that dramatic period of his life, without emotion. The absence of which he had just spoken was the occasion of his journey to Le Havre … Rachel, the *Romania*, that last farewell. And no sooner had he come back to Paris, still in the throes of his emotion, than he had found the household in turmoil: his brother vanished on the previous day, and the police called in by his father, who, it seemed, had lost his head completely, and was obstinately repeating: "He's gone and killed himself!" without deigning to give the least explanation. The domestic catastrophe had come on top of the raw wound left by the tragic ending of his love, and, now he came to think of it, he felt the shock had been a salutary one. That fixed idea of tracking down the runaway had taken his mind off his personal obsession. What little time was left over from his duties at the hospital had been spent in hurried visits to the police-stations, to the Morgue, and to detective-agencies. He had borne the brunt of everything: his father's morbid, blundering agitation, and the anxieties caused by Gise's breakdown, which for a time had endangered her life; letters that must be answered, the importunities of callers, the endless investigations carried on by private detectives abroad as well as in France, constantly raising hopes that came to nothing. When all was said and done, the strenuous life imposed on him at that time had saved him from himself.

And when, after some months of vain endeavour, he had been forced little by little to give up his inquiries, he found he was inured to living without Rachel.

They were walking fast, but this did not check Jalicourt's flow of conversation; his sense of the amenities precluded silence. He chatted of one thing and another with easy-going affability. But the more affable he seemed, the more he gave an impression that his thoughts were elsewhere.

They came to the Place du Pantheon. Jalicourt took the four flights of stairs without slackening pace. On his landing, the elderly gentleman drew himself erect, removed his hat, and, standing aside, threw open the door of his flat, with the gesture of one ushering a visitor into the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

The foyer was redolent of all the vegetables known to the French cuisine. Without lingering in it, Jalicourt ceremoniously showed his guest into a drawing-room that opened into his study. The little flat was crowded up with richly inlaid furniture, chairs upholstered in tapestry, ancient portraits, and knick-knacks of all sorts. The study was dark, and gave the impression of being a very small, low-ceiled room, the reason being that the back wall was entirely covered by a gaudy tapestry depicting the Queen of Sheba paying an official visit to King Solomon, and out of all proportion with the height of the room. It had been necessary to fold back the top and bottom edges, with the result that the figures, which were larger than life-size, touched the cornice with their diadems and had their legs cut short.

M. de Jalicourt motioned Antoine to a seat, then he himself sat on the flattened, faded cushions piled on a grandfather's chair that stood in front of the mahogany desk, littered with books and papers, at which he worked. Against the background of olive-green velvet, between the projecting wings of the old chair, his gaunt features, the large aquiline nose, slanting forehead, and the white curls that looked like a powdered wig, gave him the air of an old eighteenth-century dandy.

"Let's see now," he began, fiddling with the signet-ring that kept slipping down his thin finger, "I must set my memories in order. The first relations I had with your brother were by letter. At that time—it must be four or five years ago—your brother was, I believe, studying for his entrance examination. If my memory serves me right, he wrote to me about a certain book I brought out in that bygone era."

"Yes," Antoine put in. "*The Dawn of a Century*."

"I think I've kept his letter. I was struck by its tone, and I answered it. In fact I asked him to come and see me. He did not do so, however; not just then. He waited till he had passed the entrance examination before visiting me. That began the second phase of our acquaintance; a brief phase—an hour's conversation. Your brother dropped in quite unexpectedly, rather late in the evening, three years ago—a little before term began, in the first week of November."

"Just before he went away."

"I let him in;.my door is always open to young folk who want to see me. I haven't forgotten the determined, passionate, almost feverish expression of his face that evening." (As a matter of fact, Jacques had struck him as over-excited and rather conceited.) "He was torn between two projects, and came to ask my advice. Should he join the Ecole and complete his general education there in the usual way, or should he take another line altogether? He didn't seem to have a clear notion of exactly what it should be, that 'other line.' But I gathered he meant to turn his back on the examinations, and start working as the spirit moved him—writing."

"I had no idea," Antoine murmured. His mind was full of memories of what his own life had been during that last month preceding Rachel's departure. And he reproached himself for having left Jacques so completely to himself.

"I must confess," Jalicourt went on with a touch of affectation that became him charmingly, "that I can't remember very well what advice I gave him. Obviously I must have told him not to think of dropping the Ecole. For young men of his calibre, our curriculum is really quite harmless; they pick and choose by instinct, they have—how shall I put it?—a healthy intolerance of constraint, and refuse to be kept in leading-strings. The Ecole can damage only the timid, over-scrupulous type of mind. In any case it struck me that your brother had come to ask my advice merely as a matter of form; he had already made up his mind. And that's the surest proof that a youngster has a real vocation—has it in the blood. Don't you agree? He showed a rather—rather callow violence, when speaking to me of the 'university mentality,' of the discipline, of certain tutors—even, if I remember rightly, of his family life and social milieu. Does that surprise you? I have much affection for young people—they prevent me from ageing too quickly. They have an inkling that under the professor of literature I officially am there lurks an incorrigible old poet to whom they can open their hearts. Your brother, if my memory serves me, did not fail to do so. I must say that the intolerance of the young appeals to me. It's a good sign when a youngster is temperamentally in revolt against the world in general. All those amongst my pupils who have gone far were natural rebels, born, as my teacher Renan puts it, 'with an imprecation on their lips.'

"But let's get back to your brother. I can't recall exactly what our last words together were. All I know is that some days later—yes, a day or two later, I should say—I got a communication from him. I have it still. The instinct of the literary collector!"

Rising, he opened a cupboard and came back with a sheaf of papers, which he laid on the table.

"It's not a letter; just the copy of a poem by Walt Whitman. No signature. But your brother writes the sort of hand that one never forgets. Fine handwriting, isn't it?"

As he spoke, he was glancing over the sheet before him. He passed it to Antoine, who felt his heart beating faster as his eyes fell on it. Yes, that was Jacques's writing, emodonal and simplified to excess, yet level, sinewy, rough-hewn.

"I'm afraid," Jalicourt was saying, "I must have thrown away the envelope. I wonder from what place he sent it. Anyhow, it's only today I realize exactly what he was driving at when he sent that poem."

"My English isn't up to understanding it right off, I fear," Antoine confessed with a smile.

Jalicourt picked up the sheet, brought it near his eyeglass, and began reading the poem, translating it line by line:

"Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

"Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road."

When he had finished, Antoine gave a sigh. A short silence followed, which he was the first to break.

"And the short story?"

Jalicourt extracted from the file a foreign magazine.

"Here it is. It appeared in the September issue of *Calliope*, a 'modernist' review, brim-full of new ideas, which is published at Geneva."

Antoine had reached forward at once and was turning the pages excitedly. Suddenly once again he was startled by the sight of his brother's writing. Over the title of the story, "*La Sorellina*," Jacques had written in his own hand:

> *Did you not say to me, on that famous November evening: "Everything is subject to the influence of two poles; the truth is always double-faced"? So, sometimes, is love.*
>
> Jack Baulthy.

"Meaning …?" Antoine asked himself. Oh, well, that could wait. A Swiss magazine; did that mean Jacques was in Switzerland? *Calliope, 161 Rue du Rhône, Geneva*. Yes, it would be damnably bad luck if he could not trace Jacques now! All impatience, he rose from his seat.

"I received this magazine," Jalicourt explained, "at the end of the vacation. I found no time to acknowledge it till yesterday. I nearly sent my letter to *Calliope*, as a matter of fact. Then it struck me that publishing in a Swiss magazine doesn't necessarily mean the author has left Paris." (He omitted to mention that his choice had been influenced as well by the cost of the postage-stamp.)

But Antoine was not listening. His eagerness to *know* had outrun his patience, his cheeks were flushed, and he was mechanically turning over the pages that were a token of Jacques's return to life, catching here and there a baffling, enigmatic phrase. He was in such haste to be alone—as though the story were to give him some amazing revelation—that he took his leave rather curtly.

To an accompaniment of amiable phrases, Jalicourt escorted him to the door; all his remarks and gestures seemed part of a set ritual. In the hall he stopped and pointed with his forefinger at "*La Sorellina*," which Antoine had tucked under his arm.

"You'll see," he said. "I fully recognize that quite a deal of talent has gone into that. But, personally, I must confess … No! I'm too old." When Antoine made a politely deprecating gesture, he added: "Yes, I am. It's no use burking the truth: I've lost the power of understanding the ultra-modern. Yes, one fossilizes. Music's another story; there I've had the luck of being able to keep in step. After having been a fanatical Wagnerite, I managed to understand Debussy. But only in the nick of time; I very nearly missed Debussy! Well, M. Thibault, I'm certain that I'd miss a Debussy—in modern literature."

He had straightened his shoulders again. Looking at him, Antoine could not withhold his admiration. There was no doubt about it; the old professor cut a stately figure. As he stood below the hanging lamp, his white hair gleamed silver, and the craggy brows beetled above two gulfs of shadow, one of which the heavy lens lit up at moments with a golden glow, like a window touched by the setting sun.

Antoine made a last effort to express his gratitude. But Jalicourt seemed determined to regard polite amenities as his own prerogative. He cut the young man short, and, raising his arm, proffered a nonchalant, wide-open hand.

"Please give my best wishes for his recovery to M. Thibault. And I hope you'll be good enough to let me know what news you have of your brother."

# V

THE wind had fallen and a drizzle had set in; the street-lamps showed as blurs of light across the misty air. It was too late to think of taking any active steps, and Antoine's only idea was to get home as soon as possible.

There were no taxis at the stand. He had to make his way on foot down the Rue Soufflot, hugging the magazine to his side. But his patience was flagging with every step, and he soon felt he could wait no longer. At a corner of the boulevard the lights of the Grande Brasserie offered, if not isolation, at least a convenient shelter. Antoine decided for it.

As he moved through the revolving door, he passed two beardless youths coming out, arm in arm, laughing and chattering—of their love-affairs, he surmised. Then he heard one of them remark: "No, old man, if the human mind could envisage a relation between those two concepts …" and realized he was in the heart of the Latin Quarter.

On the ground floor all the tables were occupied and he walked to the staircase through a haze of tepid smoke. The upper floor was set apart for games of various sorts. Round the billiard-tables young men were laughing, shouting, quarrelling. "13, 14, 15." "No luck!" "Miscued again, damn it!" "Eugène, hurry up with that pint!" "Eugène, a Byrrh!" Light-hearted clamour fretted by the staccato, Morse-like click of billiard-balls. Everywhere youth in its first flush: pink cheeks glowing under the fledgeling down, bright eyes behind pince-nez, callow exuberance, eager smiles—everything told of the joy of breaking from the chrysalis, of hopes untrammelled, life for life's sake.

Antoine threaded his way between the tables, looking for a quiet corner. The noisy gaiety of the youngsters round him took his mind for a moment off his own preoccupation; for the first time he felt his thirty-odd years of life weighing on him.

"The youth of 1913," he mused. "An excellent vintage. Healthier and perhaps even more go-ahead than mine, their seniors by ten years."

He had travelled little, and rarely thought about his country; that night he was conscious of a new feeling towards France and her future as a nation—a feeling of confidence and pride. But then a shadow fell on his mood; Jacques might have been one of these promising young men. Where was Jacques? What was he doing at this moment?

Antoine noticed at the far end of the room some unoccupied tables which had been used as a rack for overcoats and hats. There was a bracket-lamp above them, and it struck him that he might do worse than settle down there, behind the rampart of piled-up garments. The only people in that part of the room were a quiet-looking couple: a youngster, pipe in mouth, reading *L'Humanité* and oblivious of the girl beside him, who was sipping a glass of hot milk. She was whiling away the time by counting her small change, polishing her nails, and examining her teeth in a pocket-mirror, while watching from the corner of an eye the people coming in. An elderly, worried-looking student held her interest for a moment, till, without waiting to order a drink, he opened a book and became absorbed in it.

Antoine had started reading, too, but somehow could not fix his attention on the words before him. Absent-mindedly, he felt his pulse; it was too fast—rarely had he been so little master of his emotions. In any case the first lines he read were baffling enough.

> The hottest hour. Odours of parched soil: dust. The path drives upwards. Sparks flash from the rock under the horse-hoofs. Sybil rides in front. Ten o'clock striking at San Paolo. A tattered foreshore ribboning the garish blue: gold and azure. On the right, endlessly, Golfo di Napoli. To the left a speck of solid gold, poised on liquid gold: Isola di Capri.

So Jacques was in Italy? Impatiently Antoine skipped some pages. What an odd jerky style of writing!

> His father. Giuseppe's feelings for his father. That secret corner of his heart, a prickly cactus, ingrowing spines. Years of unconscious, frantic, restive adulation. Every impulse of affection rebuffed. Twenty years before he brought himself to hate. Twenty years before realizing hatred was incumbent on him. Wholehearted hatred.

Antoine stopped short. He felt ill at ease. Who was this Giuseppe? He turned back to the opening pages, bidding himself keep cool.

The first scene described the two young people riding out together: Giuseppe, who seemed like Jacques, and Sybil, presumably an English girl, judging by her remarks.

> "In England we do with tentative arrangements, when they're called for. That gives us time to choose our line and act on it. You Italians want everything cut-and-dried from the start." She was thinking: In this respect, anyhow, I'm Italian already; but no need for him to know it.

On the summit Sybil and Giuseppe dismount, to rest.

> She alights before Giuseppe, flicks the scorched grass with her hunting-crop to drive the lizards away, sits down. On the furnace-hot soil.
>
> "In the sun, Sybil?"
>
> Giuseppe stretches himself on the fringe of shade along the wall. And rests his head on the warm bricks, watching her, thinking: All her movements cry out to be graceful, but never will she yield to herself.

Antoine was so carried away by his eagerness that he jumped from one paragraph to another, trying to understand before he had read the phrases out. His eye lit on a sentence.

She is English, Protestant.

He read the whole passage.

> For him all in her is new and strange. Adorable and hateful. That charm of hers, to have been born, to have lived, to be living still in a world of which he knows almost nothing. Her sadness. Her purity. Her friendliness. Her smile. No, Sybil smiles with her eyes, never with her lips. And his feelings for her—harsh, intense, embittered. She wounds him. Wishing, it seems, to think him of a lower breed, and suffering by it. "You Italians," she says. "You Southerners." She is English, Protestant.

Presumably, Sybil was some girl whom Jacques had met and loved. Perhaps he was living with her now.

> Down they ride through vineyards, lemon-groves. The beach. A herd driven by a bambino, sombre-eyed, bare shoulders peeping through the rags. He whistles, calling two white dogs to heel. The bell on the leader, clanging, clanging. Infinite space. Sunlight. Their Steps leave water-holes in the sand.

Wearied by the descriptive passages, Antoine skipped two pages. His eyes fell on an account of Sybil's home.

> Villa Lunadoro. A ramshackle old house, rose-beleaguered. A double garden, riotous with flowers.

Literature! Antoine turned the page; a sentence caught his attention.

> The rose-garden, crimson drifts of blossom, low cloisters coved with roses, a fragrance so intense under the fires of noon that it is hardly to be borne—fragrance that seeps through the pores and permeates the blood, blurring the eyes, slowing or speeding up the heart-beats.

That rose-garden, of what did it remind him? Yes, it led straight to the cote where "white pigeons fluttered." Maisons-Laffitte. And Sybil, the Protestant, could she be—? Wait, here was more about her!

> In her riding-habit Sybil sinks onto a garden-seat, arms outspread, lips tight, eyes hard. Now she is alone, everything is clear again: life has been given her to one end only—to make Giuseppe happy. But it's when he isn't here I love him. On the days when I have waited most desperately for him to come, I'm certain to make him suffer. What futile, shameful cruelty! Ah, women who can cry are the lucky ones! My heart is frozen, indurated.

At "indurated" Antoine smiled. "A medical term, that. He must have picked it up from me."

> Can he read my feelings? Ah, how I wish he could! And the moment he seems to understand me, I .cannot, cannot bear it; I shrink away, I lie, I do anything, anything to elude him!

There followed a description of Sybil's mother.

> Mrs. Powell is coming down the terrace steps. Her hair is silver in the light. Shielding her eyes with her hand, she smiles before she speaks, before she has seen Sybil. "A letter from William," she announces. "Such a nice letter. He's just begun two sketches. He intends to stay some weeks more at Paestum."
> Sybil bites her lips. Despair. Should she await her brother's return to solve the riddle of her heart, to understand herself?

Now Antoine had no doubts left. These were Mme. de Fontanin, Daniel, Jenny—figures mustered from the past. He turned hurriedly over to the next chapter, eager to find again the portrait of the father, Seregno.
Yes, here it was… . No, this was the Palazzo Seregno, an ancient mansion on the shore of the Bay.

> … tall, arched windows set in frescoed foliage.

Descriptions followed of Vesuvius and the Bay.
Antoine skipped some pages, sampling a passage here and there, so as not to lose the thread.
Giuseppe was staying, it appeared, at his father's country house, by himself except for the servants. Annetta, his "little sister," was abroad. His mother was dead—naturally. His father, Judge Seregno, had to remain in Naples, where the court was in session, and came only on Sundays or, occasionally, on week-days, for a night. "Just as Father did at Maisons," Antoine observed to himself.

> He landed from the boat at dinner-time. After dinner, the digestive process. A cigar, a stroll up and down the courtyard. Rose early to admonish stable-boys and gardeners. Taciturn as ever, caught the first morning boat.

Then, the father's character-sketch. Antoine felt a qualm of apprehension as he broached it.

Judge Seregno. A worldly success. Everything about him interlocks, fits in. Social standing, family, wealth, professional acumen, genius for organization. The majesty of office, consecrated, truculent. Adamantine probity. The steeliest virtues. And a physical appearance in keeping. Massive self-assurance. Violence at full pressure, always menacing, always under control. … A mighty caricature that inspires respect in all, and awe. Spiritual son of the Church, and model citizen. At the Vatican, as on the bench, in office and at home—everywhere lucid, commanding, exemplary, complacent, imperturbable. A force, or, rather, a dead weight to reckon with; the might of an inertia that does not move yet crushes. A well-built unity, four-square. A monument. And, ah, that small, secret, bitter laugh of his …!

For a moment the page grew blurred under Antoine's eyes. How had Jacques ever dared to write such words? The ruthlessness of the boy's revenge appalled him when he pictured the old man's pitiful decline.

Then clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we'll go …

And suddenly the gulf between his brother and himself seemed to yawn wider.

Ah, that small, secret, bitter laugh of his, following a sneering silence! For twenty years Giuseppe has endured that laugh, those silences. Fostering vengeance.

Giuseppe's youth, a forcing-bed of hatred and revolt. When he thinks of his boyhood, a thirst for revenge sears his throat. From his earliest days all his instincts, as they took form, urged him against his father. All, without exception. Idleness, disrespect, disorderliness, flaunted by way of reprisal. A wilful dunce, and heartily ashamed of it. But these were his best weapons of revolt against the hated system. An insatiable craving for the worst. Each act of disobedience with a sweet savour of revenge.

A heartless child, they said. Heartless he, whom the moan of a hurt animal, a street-musician's fiddle, the smile of a signora met in a church porch, sent sobbing to his sleep of nights! A wasteland, loneliness, childhood of frustration. Giuseppe came to man's estate without once having heard a gentle word spoken to him but by his little sister.

"What about me?" Antoine thought. A note of tenderness crept into the story when it spoke of the "little sister."

Annetta, Annetta, *sorellina*. A miracle that such a flower could grow in that dry land! Sister of his childish despairs, revolts. Sole gleam of light, cool spring in a waste of arid gloom.

"What about me?" Ah, a little further on was something about an elder brother, Umberto.

Sometimes Giuseppe seemed to catch in his brother's eyes a faint gleam of affection …

A faint gleam! What ingratitude!

… of affection, tainted with condescension. But between them lay nine years, an abyss of time. Umberto hid his true self from Giuseppe, who lied to Umberto.

Antoine stopped reading. His disagreeable first impression had passed; what did it matter if the subject of these pages touched him so nearly? After all, what real importance had Jacques's opinions about people? For that matter, what he said about Umberto was substantially correct. What amazed him was the bitterness behind it all. After three years' separation, three years by himself without news of the family— yes, Jacques must have loathed his past with a vengeance to write such words! One thing worried him: though he might find his brother again, could he find the way back to his brother's heart?

He skimmed the remaining pages to see if there was more about Umberto, and found he was hardly mentioned. With a secret disappointment… .

Then his eyes lit on a passage, the tone of which whetted his curiosity.

Without friends, curled up into a ball against the blows of circumstance, watching his life fall to pieces …

That was Giuseppe's life, alone in Rome; had that been Jacques's life in some foreign city?

Some evenings. The air in his room unbreathable. The book falls. He blows out the lamp, goes forth into the night, like a young wolf. Messalina's Rome, squalid districts, everywhere death-traps, lures. Furtive gleams between the provocatively drawn curtains. Crowded darkness, shadows offering themselves, cajoling: lasciviousness. He slips past walls honeycombed with lust. Is he fleeing from himself? What can quench the thirst consuming him? For hours, his mind a chaos of wild deeds undone, he drifts on, unheeding. His eyes are burning, hands fever-hot, throat parched. As foreign to himself as if he had bartered body and soul. Sweating with fear and lust, he moves in a circle. Slinks down alleys, skirting the same pitfalls again and again. Hour after hour… .

Too late. The lights are dying out behind the furtive curtains. Streets grow empty. He is alone now with his evil genius. Ripe for any lapse. Too late. Impotent, drained dry by the riot of imaginative lust.

Night is ending. Belated purity of silence, lonely hush of daybreak. Too late. Sick at heart, dead beat, unsatisfied, degraded, he drags himself to his room, slips between the sheets. Without remorse. Bewildered. And lies there till the sky pales, chewing the cud of bitterness; bitterness of not having dared… .

Why did Antoine find this such painful reading? It gave him no surprise that his young brother had taken his fill of life, had stooped to sordid adventures; indeed, he was quite prepared to laugh it off with a genial "Why not?" or even: "So much the better!" And yet …

Hastily he turned over some more pages. He could not bring himself to read methodically, and merely guessed, with more or less success, at the development of the story.

The Powells' villa, on the shore of the Bay, was near the Palazzo Seregno. Thus Giuseppe and Sybil were neighbours during vacations. They went out for rides together, and boating in the Bay.

> Giuseppe went daily to the Villa Lunadoro. Sybil never refused to see him. The mystery of Sybil. Giuseppe dangled round her, joylessly.

Antoine was getting bored by the descriptions of this love-affair; it held up the story. Still, he brought himself to read a portion of a rather long scene, following a seeming estrangement of the two young people.

> Sundown. Giuseppe comes to the villa. Sybil. Drunk with the perfumes of sun-steeped flowers, the garden is sobering down as night comes on. Like a prince in the *Arabian Nights*, Giuseppe walks between two walls of flame, the pomegranates in flower fired by the sunset. Sybil! Sybil! No one answers. Closed windows, drawn blinds. He stops. Round him the swallows weave shrill, dizzying circles in the air. No one. Is she under the pergola, behind the house? With an effort he keeps from running.
>
> At the corner of the house, an eddy of soft sounds. Sybil playing the piano. The bay-window is open. What is she playing? A murmur of heartrending sighs, a sad, unanswered plea rising on the calm evening air. An almost human tone, a phrase spoken yet incomprehensible, beyond translation into words. Listening, he comes nearer, steps onto the threshold. Sybil has not heard him. Her face, shamelessly naked. Fluttering eyelids, parted lips—all reticence gone. Shining through that face, the soul; no, her soul, her love, is there incarnate. In solitude revealed, a startled secret, love's offering, stolen, ravished. She is playing; tendrils of light sound float up, entwining in a supreme ecstasy. A sob abruptly stifled, then a sad arpeggio that rises up and up, attenuated, rarefied, mysteriously hovering on the silence, before taking wing into the blue, like a sudden flight of birds.
>
> Sybil has lifted her fingers from the keys. The piano is throbbing still; a hand pressed on the lid would feel the tumult of a pulsing heart. She thinks she is alone. 'She turns her head. With a slowness, a grace unknown to him. And then …

Antoine was exasperated by this mania for short, jerky phrases. "Literature" run wild! Still—had Jacques really fallen in love with Jenny?

But his imagination was running ahead of the story; he came back to the text.

Again his eye was caught by the name Umberto. The passage described a brief scene at the Palazzo Seregno; one evening the Judge came back unexpectedly to dinner, accompanied by his elder son.

> The vast dining-room. Three vaulted windows, opening on a pink sky ribboned by the smoke from Vesuvius. Stucco walls, green pilasters supporting a false dome painted on the ceiling.
>
> *Benedicite*. The Judge's thick lips flutter. He crosses himself. The gesture sweeps across the room. Umberto follows suit, for appearance' sake. Giuseppe obstinately refrains. They take their seats. Immaculate, austere, the huge white tablecloth. Three places laid, too far apart. Filippo, felt-shod, with the silver dishes …

Antoine skipped some paragraphs. Then:

> In the father's presence the Powells' name is never uttered. He refused to know William. That foreigner. A painter, too. Poor Italy, the happy-hunting-ground of every vagabond! A year ago, he had put his foot down. "I forbid you to see those heretics."
>
> Does he suspect he is being disobeyed?

Impatiently Antoine turned some pages, and came on another reference to the elder brother.

> Umberto puts in some innocent remarks. Then silence closes in again. A handsome forehead, Umberto's. Proud, thoughtful eyes. Elsewhere, most likely, he is young, expansive. He has studied. A brilliant career lies before him. Giuseppe loves his brother. Not as a brother. Like an uncle who might become a friend. Were they together long enough, Giuseppe would speak out perhaps. But their talks are brief, are few and only on set occasions. No, intimacy with Umberto is ruled out.

"Obviously," Antoine murmured, remembering the summer of 1910. "That was because of Rachel. My fault, of course."

He stopped reading for a moment and let his head sink dejectedly against the chair-back. He was disappointed; all this high-flown verbiage led nowhere, left unsolved the mystery of Jacques's disappearance.

The orchestra was playing the refrain of a Viennese waltz; people in the café were humming it in undertones, with here and there an unseen whistler joining in. The quiet couple near him had not moved. The woman had drunk her milk and now was smoking, with a bored expression. Now and again, resting her bare arm on her companion's shoulder—he had just unfolded *The Rights of Man*—she absent-mindedly stroked the lobe of his ear, while yawning like a cat.

"Not many women here," Antoine observed. "The ones there are, are mostly youngish. And relegated to a secondary plane; merely bedmates."

A discussion had sprung up between two groups of students, who were hurling the firebrand names of Jaurès and Péguy from one table to the other with noisy truculence.

A young, blue-jowled Jew had sat down between the youth reading *The Rights of Man* and the yawning girl; she no longer seemed bored.

With an effort Antoine started reading again. He had lost his place. Turning the pages, he lit on the closing lines of "*La Sorellina*."

> Here life and love are impossible. Goodbye.
> Lure of the unknown, lure of a wholly new tomorrow, ecstasy. The past forgotten, take to the open road.
> The first train to Rome. Rome, the first train to Genoa. Genoa, the first liner. . . .

No more was needed to rekindle Antoine's interest. "Slowly now!" he adjured himself. "Jacques's secret is hidden somewhere in these pages, and I've got to find it." He must go right through the story, paragraph by paragraph, carefully, composedly.

He turned back and, propping his forehead on his hands, setded down to work.

He began with the homecoming of Annetta, Giuseppe's foster-sister, from the Swiss convent where she was completing her education.

> A little changed, Annetta. Before, the servants used to boast of her. *E una vera napoletana*. Plump shoulders. Dusky skin. Fleshy lips. Eyes that flashed into laughter on the least pretext.

Why had he dragged Gise into this story? Moreover, from the first scene between brother and foster-sister, Antoine began to feel a certain discomfort.

Giuseppe had gone to meet Annetta; they were driving back to the Palazzo Seregno.

> The sun has dipped behind the summits. The antiquated barouche rocks under the shaky hood. Shadows. Sudden coolth.
> Annetta, chatterbox Annetta. She slips her arm through Giuseppe's. And prattles away. He laughs. How alone he was—till just now! Sybil does not dispel his loneliness. Sybil, a dark, deep, ever-translucent lake, blinding depths of purity.
> The landscape tightens round the old barouche. Dusk closing in. Nightfall.
> Annetta snuggles up, as in the past. A hurried kiss. Warm, supple, dust-roughened lips. As in the past. In the convent, too, laughter, chatter, kisses. In love with Sybil, what warm, sweet comfort he finds in the *sorellina's* caresses! He gives her kiss for kiss. Anywhere, on her eyes, on her hair. Noisy, brotherly kisses. The driver laughs. She prattles on. At the convent, you know … oh, those exams! Giuseppe, too; of anything and everything: their father, next autumn, plans for the future. But keeps one thing to himself; not a word about the Powells. Annetta is religious. In her bedroom, six candles burn at the Madonna's shrine. The Jews crucified Christ; they did not know He was the Son of God. But the heretics knew. They denied the Truth wilfully, through pride.

During their father's absence, the two young people settle down together at the Palazzo Seregno. Some passages were painful reading for Antoine from the first word to the last.

> Next morning Annetta runs in while Giuseppe is still in bed. Yes, now he notices, she has changed a little. Her eyes are still as large and pure as in the past, and full of a vague wonder, but a new glow is in them; the least thing might blur their serenity for ever. Warm, yielding flesh. She has come straight from her bed. Her hair all rumpled; a child she is, no coquetry. As in the past. Already she has fished out of her boxes her "souvenirs" of Switzerland. "Just look at this—and this!" Gleams of white, well-formed teeth behind the fluttering lips. Telling about her fall, out skiing. A spike of rock pierced her knee. Look, the mark's not gone! Under the dressing-gown, the smooth curve of her leg, her thigh; warm naked flesh. She strokes the scar, a white patch on the warm brown skin. Absentmindedly. She loves fondling herself; dotes on her mirror every morning, every night, smiling to her body. Now she is chattering again. All sorts of memories. Riding-lessons. "I'd like to go out riding with you—in my riding costume; we'd have gallops along the beach." Still stroking her leg. Crooking, straightening her knee; ripple of silken skin. Giuseppe's eyelids flutter, he lies back in bed. At last the dressing-gown falls back. She runs to the window. Sunbeams romping on the Bay. "Lazybones, it's nine! Let's go for a swim!"

For several days they see each other thus, each morning. Giuseppe shares his time between his *sorellina* and the sphinx-like English girl.

Antoine skimmed the pages rapidly. Then one day when Giuseppe has come to take Sybil for a boating expedition in the Bay, a scene, seemingly decisive, takes place between them. Overcoming his distaste for the insufferable lushness of the writing, Antoine read almost every word of it.

> Sybil under the pergola, on the edge of the sunlight. Lost in dreams. Her hand resting on a white pillar, in the light. Waiting for him? "I expected you yesterday." "I stayed with Annetta." "Why don't you bring her here?" Her tone displeased Giuseppe.

A few lines further on.

> Giuseppe stops rowing. Round them the air grows still. Winged silence. The bay is all quicksilver. Sheen. Water-music. Ripples lapping against the boat. "What are you thinking about?" "And you?" Silence. A change in their voices. "I'm

thinking of you, Sybil." "And I am thinking of you, Giuseppe." He is trembling. "For all our lives, Sybil?" Yes, her head droops. He sees her lips part with a painful effort, her hand dasp the gunwale. A silent pledge, almost a regret. The sea ablaze in the. flaming noon. Dazzling effulgence. Heat. Immobility. Time and life halted, in suspense. Unbearable oppression. Then a sudden flight of gulls brings life back to the listless air. They soar and dive and skim the sea, dip their beaks, and soar again. Gleams of sun-bright wings, clash of swords. "We are thinking about the same things, Sybil."

Actually Jacques had seen a great deal of the Fontanins that summer. Antoine began to wonder if the explanation of his flight might not be the failure of his love-affair with Jenny.

Some pages further on, the action began, it seemed, to move more quickly.

Among descriptions of everyday events that recalled to Antoine the life Jacques and Gise had led at Maisons, he followed the disturbing trend of the affection between Giuseppe and Annetta. Did the young people realize the nature of their intimacy? As for Annetta, all she knew was that the whole set of her being drew her towards Giuseppe; but so simple was her faith, so entire her innocence, that she lent her feelings the colour of a harmless, sisterly devotion. For Giuseppe, the love he confessedly had for Sybil seemed at first to absorb his thoughts, blinding him to the nature of the physical attraction Annetta exercised on him. The question was, how long would he be able to keep up this self-deception?

Late one afternoon Giuseppe made a suggestion to the *sorellina*.

"What do you say to a stroll, now it's getting cooler, then dinner at a country inn, and a good long tramp afterwards, till it's dark?" She claps her hands. "Oh, Beppino, I do love you so when you're cheerful!"

Had Giuseppe laid his plans in advance? After a makeshift meal in a fishing village, he led the girl along paths she did not know.

He is walking quickly. Along the stony paths between the lemon-groves which he had trod a hundred times with Sybil. Annetta grows anxious. "Sure you know the road?" He turns left. The path slopes down. An old well, a low, curved gateway. Giuseppe stops. "Now come and see," he laughs. She moves forward, unsuspecting. He pushes the door open, a bell tinkles. "What on earth are you doing?" Laughing, he draws her into the black garden. Under the firs. She is frightened, puzzled.

She steps into Villa Lunadoro.

That low, curved gateway, the tinkling bell, the fir-grove; Antoine recognized each detail, unmistakably.

Mrs. Powell and Sybil are in the pergola. "May I introduce my sister Annetta?" They give her a seat, question her, make much of her. Annetta fancies she is dreaming. The white-haired lady's welcome, her smile. "Come with me, my dear; I want to give you some of our roses." Vaulted shadows of the rose-garden, drenching the air with heady fragrance.

Sybil and Giuseppe are alone now. Should he take her hand? She would only shrink away. That steely reserve of hers is stronger than her will, than her love. He thinks: How hard it is for her to let herself be loved!

Mrs. Powell has picked the roses for Annetta. Small, close-set crimson roses, without spines; crimson petals with black hearts. "You must come again, dear; Sybil has so few friends, you know." Annetta fancies she is dreaming. Are these people the "gang of heretics"? Is it possible she once feared them like the plague?

Antoine skipped a page and came to the description of Annetta and Giuseppe's walk home.

The moon is veiled. The darkness deeper. Annetta feels light, buoyed on wings. She lets the full weight of her young body hang on Giuseppe's arm; Giuseppe guides her through the darkness, his head high, heart far away, lost in a dream. Shall he tell her his secret? Why not? He bends over her. "It's not only for Will's sake, you know, that I go to see them."

His face is hidden in shadows, but she hears the low intensity of his tone. "Not only for Will's sake!" Wildfire racing through her veins. She had never dreamt „ . . Sybil, then? Sybil and Giuseppe …? Choking, she breaks loose, tries to escape, stricken, barbed death in her flanks. No strength. A few steps more. Her teeth are chattering. She goes limp, stumbles, drops back onto the grass under the tall lime-trees.

Uncomprehending, he kneels beside her. What is wrong? But then her arms shoot up like tentacles. And now—-he understands. She winds her arms around him, clings desperately, sobs. "Giuseppe! Oh, Giuseppe!"

The love-cry. He has never heard it. Never before. Sybil, cloistered in her secrecy. Her alien blood. And pressed to him now a young, sensuous body, aching with regret, yielding, yearning. Thoughts dance through his brain, memories of childhood, the love they bore each other, the trust and tenderness; how can he not love her? She is of his own kind; he must comfort her, make her well. Flowing round him, clinging, the soft warmth of a living body, fluent limbs. Then a sudden wave sweeping all before it, drowning consciousness. In his nostrils a new, yet familiar fragrance of loosened hair; under his lips a tear-drenched face, throbbing mouth. All love's accomplices: darkness, perfumes, ungovernable ecstasy, a fever of the blood. On the moist lips he presses his mouth's kiss; on the half-parted lips, awaiting they know not what, a lover's kiss. She gives herself to his caress, does not return it yet, but only yields, surrenders, offers her mouth again and again. Floods of longing surge up from their hearts, meet and clash as the wet lips cling together. Bitter yearning … sweetness. Mingled breaths, limbs, desires. Overhead the green darkness eddies, the stars go out. Clothes scattered, disarrayed, all resistance gone, all barriers falling, close, closer, flesh to flesh surrendering, a thrill of sweet pain, consummate, ah, consummate joy… .

Ah! A single sigh, and time stands still.

The silence throbs with echoes, blurred sounds. Elemental fear. Arrested movement. The man's face, panting, pillowed on the young breast; thud of racing heart-beats, two separate rhythms, unconsonant, irreconcilable.

Then suddenly a questing moonray, a prying, callous eye, flicks them like a whiplash, tears them apart.

Abruptly they stand up. Bewildered, lost. Tormented lips. Shuddering, but not with shame; with joy, with joy and wonder. With joy and new desire. In a litde grassy hollow the bunch of crimson roses sheds its petals under the moon. Annetta makes a romantic gesture, picks up the roses, shakes them. A cloud of petals flutters down over the crushed grass, which bears the imprint of a single body.

Antoine was profoundly shocked, quivering with disgust. Unthinkable that Gise should have acted thus!

And yet—! Everything rang so precisely true—not only such details as the old wall, the rose-garden, the gate-bell. At the moment when they sank onto the grass, locked in an embrace, the mask of fiction fell. That was no stony path in Italy, nor were the shadows those of lemon-trees. No, that was unmistakably the rank grass of Maisons, which Antoine was recalling now only too clearly; and the trees were the centenarian lime-trees of the green avenue. Yes, Jacques must have taken Gisèle to the Fontanins', and on such a summer night, on the way back … Simpleton—to have lived beside them, so close to Gisèle, and to have guessed nothing or: it all! … And yet—no, Antoine did not believe; in his inmost heart he could not bring himself to admit that that chaste, elusive little Gise could shelter such a secret.

Still, there were so many pointers, the crimson roses for instance. Now he understood Gisèle's emotion when she received that anoaymous box from a London florist and why, on the strength of what seemed so slender a clue, she had pressed him to have inquiries made immediately in England. Obviously she alone had read the message of those crimson roses sent a year, to the very day perhaps, after the love-scene under the lime-trees.

So Jacques must have stayed in London. Perhaps in Italy, too. And Switzerland. Could he be still in England? He might very easily contribute to a Genevan review, while living there.

Then, of a sudden, other facts that had baffled him grew clear, as if screening shadows were withdrawing from a nucleus of light. Gisèle's departure, her insistence on being sent to that English convent. Obviously it had been in order to trace Jacques. And now Antoine reproached himself for not having followed up, after his first failure, the clue provided by the London florist.

He tried to set his data in order, but in vain; too many theories— too many memories, as well—kept cropping up. He was coming to see the whole past in a new light. How easy now it was to understand Gise's despair when Jacques disappeared! He had never suspected all the implications of her grief, though he had done his best to allay it. He remembered how sorry he had been for her then; indeed it was out of his sympathy that another feeling for her had been born.

In those days he had found it impossible to talk about Jacques to his father, who obstinately clung to his theory of the boy's suicide; or to Mademoiselle, immersed day in, day out, in her prayers and religious exercises. But Gise had been different; her fervour for the quest had brought her very near him. Daily after dinner she had come down to hear the latest news. He had enjoyed imparting to her his hopes, and the steps he was taking. And it was in the course of those long, intimate talks that he had began to feel drawn towards the high-strung little girl, whose secret love was the keynote of her existence. Unknowingly, perhaps, he had yielded to the heady lure of the young body already bespoken to another. He recalled her sudden outbursts of affection, the little coaxing ways that reminded him of a suffering child's. Annetta! Yes, she had tricked him well! Of course, in his utter sentimental isolation after Rachel's eclipse, he had been only too ready to imagine—things. He shrugged his shoulders angrily. Damned fool! He had been taken with Gise, only because his emotions had been at a loose end. And he had fancied Gise was drawn to him, merely because, in the throes of her frustrated passion, she had clung to him as the one person capable of finding her lost lover.

Distasteful ideas! Antoine tried to brush them aside. He reminded himself that he had found nothing so far to explain Jacques's hasty flight from home.

With an effort he turned back to "*La Sorellina*."

Leaving the roses scattered on the grass, the young people walked back to the Palazzo.

Homewards. Giuseppe helps Annetta on her way. What lies before them? That brief ecstasy can have been but a prelude. The long night towards which they are walking, their night together in the big, lonely house— what will it bring?

Antoine could hardly bear to read further. Again he felt the blood rising to his cheeks.

Yet of moral disapproval there was little in his mood. When confronted with a passion running its course, he gave short shrift to moral codes. But he was unable to repress a feeling of outraged surprise, touched with rancour; he could not forget the day when Gise had so indignantly repulsed his timid advances. Almost "La Sorellina" rekindled his desire for her—a purely physical, unequivocal craving. So much so that, to fix his attention on what he was reading, he had deliberately to banish from his mind the haunting picture of a young, lithe, nut-brown body.

… that night together in the big, lonely house—what will it bring?

Love bows them to its yoke. Silent, possessed, in an enchanted dream, they walk, escorted by the intermittent moon. Moonlight is playing on the Palazzo, picking out of the shadow the stuccoed pillars. They cross the first terrace. As they walk, cheek brushes cheek. Annetta's cheeks are burning. Already, in that childish body, what natural hardihood for sin!

Abruptly they draw apart. A shadow has loomed up between the pillars.

The father is there. Awaiting them. He has returned unexpectedly. "Where can the children be?" He has dined alone in the great hall; ever since then paced to and fro on the marble terrace. "Where can the children be?"

His voice jars the silence.

"Where have you been?"

No time to think out a lie. A brief flash of revolt. Giuseppe cries:

"With the Powells."

Antoine gave a start. Then had his father known …?

"With the Powells."

Annetta slips away between the pillars, crosses the vestibule, runs up the stairs to her bedroom, locks herself in, and flings herself, in the dark, upon her narrow, virginal bed.

Downstairs, for the first time, the son confronts his father. And—strangest thing of all—for the sheer joy of bravado he affirms that other, wraithlike love in which he believes no more. "I took Annetta to see Mrs. Powell." He pauses, then adds in a clear, emphatic tone: "I am engaged to Sybil."

The father bursts out laughing. A terrifying laugh. Extended by the shadow that prolongs it, the massive form looks more imposing still, of more than human stature, a Titan haloed with moonlight. Laughing. Giuseppe wrings his hands. The laugh ends. Silence. "You shall come back with me to Naples, both of you, tomorrow." "No!" "Giuseppe!" "I do not belong to you. I am engaged to Sybil Powell."

Never yet has the father met a resistance that he has not crushed. He feigns calmness. "Be silent, boy! They come here to eat our bread, to buy our land. To take our sons as well—that's too much. Did you imagine a heretic could ever bear our name?" "My name." "Fool! Never. A Huguenot intrigue … The salvation of a soul … Honour of the Seregnos. But they reckoned without me. I can defend my own." "Father!" "I'll break your will. I'll cut you off. I'll have you enlisted in the Piedmont regiment." "Father!" "Yes, I'll break you. Go to your room. You shall leave this place tomorrow."

Giuseppe clenches his fists. He wants his father to …

Antoine drew a deep breath.

… to die.

Somehow he brings himself to laugh: the last affront. "You're comic!"

He walks past his father. His head high, mouth twisted in a mocking laugh, he goes down the steps.

"Where are you going?"

The boy stops. What poisoned barb shall he launch before he disappears for ever? Instinct gives him the words that will tell most. "I am going to kill myself."

With a quick movement he is down the steps. The father has raised his arm. "Go away, you shameless son." For the last time the father's voice is heard, shouting in imprecation. "My curse on you!"

Giuseppe runs across the terrace, out into the night.

Antoine had half a mind to pause again, and ponder; but only a few pages remained and impatience got the better of him.

Giuseppe runs blindly forward. Then stops, breathless, perplexed, all at sea. In the distance a thin, plaintive melody rising, falling; mandolins on some hotel veranda. Melting languor. How blissful death, veins opened, in the soft warmth of a bath!

Sybil does not like the music of Neapolitan mandolins. Sybil, a foreigner. Remote, unreal as the heroine one has loved madly—in a book.

Annetta. The memory of a bare arm nestling in his hand, enough! A buzzing in the ears. Dry lips.

Giuseppe has planned it all. Fie will come back at daybreak, carry off Annetta, flee with her. He will steal into ber room; she will jump out of bed, bare-limbed, welcoming. Ah, sweetness of her embrace, smooth, yielding sinews, the warm fragrance of her body! Almost he feels her now, straining to him, with lightly parted lips, moist lips, Annetta!

Giuseppe plunges into a side-path. His heart beats wildly. At a bound he crosses a ridge of rock. Bracing airs, the countryside under the moon.

At the edge of a thicket he lies on his back, arms outspread. Passes his fingers through his open shirt-neck, strokes his heaving breast. Overhead, a milk-white sky, star-spangled. Peace, purity.

And Sybil?

Giuseppe jumps up. Strides hotfoot down the hillside. Sybil. For the last time; before daybreak.

Lunadoro. The wall, the curving gateway. On that newly whitewashed wall, the exact place of his shadow-kiss. His first avowal, here. On such a night, moon-enchanted. Sybil had come to see him off. Her shadow clean-cut on the white wall. He had taken courage, bent and kissed the shadow of her face. She had run away. On such a night as this.

Why have I come back to the little gate, Annetta? Sybil's pale face, wilful, unyielding. Remote? No, near, and real, yet still all unknown. Can he give Sybil up? No, rather unlock that fast-shut heart, with love the key. Release her stifled soul. What is the secret sealing it? Ah, dream of purity, unsoiled by instinct, real love! His love of Sybil, real love.

Why those meek eyes and too submissive lips, Annetta! No flame leaps in your all-too-docile flesh. Short-lived desire. Love without mystery, depth, horizons. With no tomorrow.

Annetta, let us forget those kisses, lightly given, lightly taken; let's be children again. Dear Annetta, little, lovely girl. Little sister!

Submissive lips, yes, but eager, too; moist, melting, clinging lips. Ah, fatal, criminal desire, who shall deliver us from this body of desire?

Annetta, Sybil. Love rent in twain. Which? Why have to choose? I meant no wrong. Dual attraction; necessary, hallowed equilibrium. Twin impulses, equally legitimate, for they spring from the depth of my being. Why, in reality, irreconcilable? How pure it might be, under the free, broad light of day! Why this ban, if in my heart all is harmony?

Only one solution: one of the three must drop out. Which?

Sybil? Ah, vision unbearable! Sybil in pain; not Sybil. Annetta, then?

Annetta, *sorellina*, forgive me.

Not one without the other; well, then—neither! Renunciation, oblivion, death. No, not death; death's likeness. Eclipse. Here a curse lies on all, an interdiction; the prison-house.

Here life and love are impossible. Goodbye.

Lure of the unknown, lure of a wholly new tomorrow, ecstasy. The past forgotten, take to the open road.

Turn away. Hurry to the station. The first train to Rome. Rome, the first train to Genoa. Genoa, the first liner. To America, or to Australia.

Suddenly he laughs.

A woman, women? No, it's life I love. Forward!

Jack Baulthy.

Antoine closed the magazine with a bang, crammed it into his pocket, and stood up. For a moment, dizzily, he blinked at the lights; then, feeling his head spinning, he sat down again.

While he was reading, the room had gradually emptied; the band had stopped, the billiard-players gone off to dinner. Alone in their corner, the Jew and the youth who had been reading *The Rights of Man* were finishing off a game of backgammon, under the pert eyes of the girl beside them. Her friend was puffing at a dead pipe, and each time he threw the dice the minx rubbed her head against the Jew's shoulder with a little provocative giggle.

Antoine stretched his legs, lit a cigarette, and tried to set his thoughts in order. But for some minutes his mind kept wandering, like his gaze; there was no steadying it. The picture of Jacques and Gise kept rising before him; at last he thrust it aside, and regained some measure of calm.

The crucial problem was to draw a sharp dividing line between facts and fiction. That stormy interview between father and son, he was convinced, had actually taken place as Jacques described it. Some of the phrases used by the old judge, Seregno, rang obviously true: "Huguenot intrigues"; "I'll break you"; "I'll cut you off"; "I'll have you enlisted." And the remark about a heretic "bearing our name." Antoine could almost hear the angry voice of his father as he stood there raging on the terrace, hurling his curse into the darkness. And true, undoubtedly, was Giuseppe's threat: "I am going to kill myself"— which at last explained M. Thibault's fixed idea. From the very start, he had always refused to believe that Jacques was still alive, and he had telephoned four times a day to the Morgue. That too explained his remorse, his half-disclosed admission that he had been to blame for Jacques's disappearance. Quite conceivably this rankling self-reproach might have some connexion with the attack of albuminuria the old man had had just before the operation. In the light of these facts many events of the past three years took on a new complexion.

Antoine picked up the magazine and read again the dedication written in Jacques's hand.

*Did you not say to me, on that famous November evening: "Everything is subject to the influence of two poles; the truth is always double-faced"? So, sometimes, is love.*

Jack Baulthy.

Evidently, he mused, that would account for many things—the tangle Jacques had got into with those two love-affairs. If Gise was Jacques's mistress and, at the same time, he was so desperately in love with Jenny, life must have been infernally difficult for him. And yet …

Antoine could not help feeling that there remained something elusive and obscure which he so far had failed to grasp. Try as he might, he could not bring himself to think that Jacques's departure was accounted for merely by what he had just learned of the boy's emotional dilemma. That desperate resolve must have been enforced by other circumstances as well, some sudden impact of imponderable factors.

Then all at once it struck him that these problems could very well wait. The important thing now was to make the most of the clues he had just lit on, and to get on his brother's track as soon as possible.

It would be an obvious blunder to write direcdy to the office of the review. That Jacques had given no sign of life proved that he was still determined to lie low. To risk letting him guess that his retreat had been detected involved the danger that he might be prompted to move on again, and be lost sight of irretrievably. Yes, Antoine mused, there was only one way to a successful issue and that was to launch a surprise attack, and in person—for he had no real confidence in anyone except himself.

Promptly he pictured himself alighting from the train at Geneva.

But what would he do, once there? Jacques might be living in London. No, the best thing would be first of all to send a detective to Switzerland, to ascertain Jacques's whereabouts. "And then," he murmured, rising from the table, "I'll go and dig him out, wherever he is. If only I can take him by surprise, we'll see if he escapes me!"

That evening he gave his instructions to a detective-bureau.

Four days later he received the following document:

*Private and Confidential*

M. Jack Baulthy is, as you surmised, resident in Switzerland. He is not living at Geneva, however, but at Lausanne, where, we learn, he has had several successive residences. Since April last he has been staying at the Pension Kammerzinn, 10 Rue des Escarliers-du-Marche.

We have not yet been able to verify the date on which he entered Swiss territory. Meanwhile, however, we have taken steps to discover his position as regards the military authorities.

From information elicited by private inquiries at the French Consulate we learn that M. Baulthy presented himself in January 1912, at the military bureau of the said consulate, bringing various identification and other papers in the name of Jacques Jean Paul Oscar-Thibault, of French nationality, born in Paris in 1890. We were unable to procure a copy of his description on the military registration form (this description is, however, identical with that already cited), but we would inform you that the said form shows that M. Baulthy was granted a provisional exemption from military service on the ground of functional disorder of the heart, in 1910, under an order of the Board of Military Examiners, in Paris; and an extension of the said exemption, in 1911, by virtue of a medical certificate submitted in 1911 to the French Consul at Vienna. He underwent another medical examination at Lausanne in February 1912; the decision of the Board was transmitted through the proper channels to the Recruiting Bureau of the Seine Department. A third extension was granted by

the Bureau, and as a result he has nothing to apprehend from the French Authorities as regards the question of his military service.

We gather that M. Baulthy is leading a respectable life, and his friends are for the most part journalists and students. He is a registered member of the Swiss Press Club. The literary work he does for several daily papers and periodicals assures him an honest livelihood. We are told that M. Baulthy writes under several names besides his own, which we shall be pleased to ascertain if further advices are received from you to that effect.

The report was marked *Urgent*, and was brought to Antoine on a Sunday at 10 p.m. by a special messenger from the detective-bureau.

It was quite impossible for Antoine to leave the following morning, but M. Thibault's condition was such that he dared not delay. After consulting his engagement-book and the time-table, he decided to take the Lausanne express on Monday evening. All that night he did not sleep a wink.

# VI

THAT Monday was already a particularly heavy day for appointments, but somehow Antoine, owing to his departure, had to fit into it several extra visits. He left for the hospital at an early hour and spent the rest of the day rushing to and fro in Paris, without even finding time to snatch a lunch at home. He did not get back fill after seven in the evening. The train left at eight-thirty.

While Léon packed his suitcase, Antoine ran up to see his father, whom he had not visited since the previous day. There had been, he noticed, a definite change for the worse. M. Thibault had been unable to take food; he was in a very weak state and in constant pain.

It was an effort for Antoine to greet him as usual with that cheery "Hallo, Father!" which acted on the old man as a never-failing tonic. He sat down in his usual chair and began putting the daily series of questions, eschewing like a pitfall the least interval of silence. Though outwardly he looked cheerful as ever, a thought kept running in his mind insistently: "He is very near his end."

Several times he was struck by the brooding gaze his father cast on him, dark with unuttered questions.

Antoine wondered how far the dying man guessed the truth as to his actual condition. M. Thibault often spoke with resignation and solemnity of his approaching end. But what did he really think deep within his heart?

For some minutes father and son, each absorbed in his unspoken thoughts—the same thoughts, very likely—exchanged trivial remarks about symptoms and the latest treatments. Then Antoine rose, remarking that he had an urgent case to visit before dinner. M. Thibault, who was in pain, made no effort to detain him.

So far Antoine had let no one into the secret of his departure. His intention had been to tell no one but the nurse that he would be away for the next thirty-six hours. Unfortunately, when he was leaving the sick-room, she was busy with the invalid.

There was no time to lose. He waited some moments in the corridor; then, when she failed to appear, he looked in on Mile, de Waize, who was writing a letter in her room.

"I'm so glad you've come, Antoine," she began at once. "You must lend me a hand! Do you know, a basket of vegetables has somehow gone astray!"

He had immense difficulty in making her understand that he had been summoned to the country that night for an urgent case, that he would probably not be back next day, but that there was no need for anxiety; Dr. Thérivier had been informed of his departure and would come immediately, if necessary.

It was after eight; Antoine had not a minute to lose. He told the taxi-driver to make haste, and, to the accelerated tempo of an adventure film, the Place du Carrousel, the sleek, black bridges and deserted quaysides scudded past the windows. For Antoine, who rarely travelled, there was a thrill in speeding thus across the darkness; the sense of sudden crisis, the myriad thoughts fermenting in his brain, and, most of all, the element of risk in his rash quest, had plunged him into an exciting world of high adventure.

The car in which his seat had been reserved was nearly full. In vain he tried to sleep. His nerves on edge, he began counting the stops. Towards the end of the night, when he was just dropping off, the engine emitted a long, lugubrious shriek; the train was slowing down for the Vallorbe station. After the customs formalities, after standing in line in bleak, cold passages, and gulping down a cup of strong Swiss coffee, he abandoned hope of getting to sleep again.

The visible world was slowly taking form in the tardy December dawn. The train was following the bed of a valley, and dim hillsides loomed on either hand. No colour anywhere; in the harsh grey light the landscape showed like a charcoal sketch, all in blacks and whites.

Antoine's gaze registered the scene impassively. Snow crowned the hill-tops, and sprawled in slabs of melting whiteness along pitch-black ravines. Sudden shadows of tall fir-trees etched the grey slopes. Then all grew blurred: the train was passing through a cloud. Presently he had a glimpse of open country studded everywhere with pinpoint yellow lights glimmering through the mist, tokens of a thickly populated countryside and early-rising folk. Already clusters of houses were becoming visible and, as the tide of darkness ebbed, fewer lights shone in the buildings.

Gradually the blackness of the soil was fading into green, and soon the whole plain showed as a bright expanse of luxuriant meadows, streaked with white bands marking each fold of the ground, each watercourse and furrow. In the low farmhouses squatting on their crofts like broody hens, all the little window-shutters were swinging open. The sun had risen.

Gazing vaguely across the trembling pane, Antoine felt the melancholy of this foreign landscape colouring his mood. A sense of hopelessness came over him, and now the difficulties of his project seemed insuperable. Moreover, he was alarmingly conscious that after his sleepless night he was in the worst possible form to face them.

Meanwhile Lausanne was drawing near; the train was already passing through the suburbs. He gazed at the still sleep-bound house-fronts; tiered with balconies, four-square and standing on its own ground, each block of flats looked like a miniature skyscraper. Quite possibly behind one of those light-hued Venetian blinds, Jacques was getting up at this very moment.

The train stopped. An icy wind was sweeping the platform. Antoine shivered. The passengers were flocking down a subway. Dog-tired, his nerves In rags, his mind and will for once completely out of hand, he followed the crowd, wearily dragging his bag along, uncertain what step to take next. A notice, "Wash and Brush-up, Baths, Showers," caught his eye. Just the thing! A warm bath first to relax his muscles, followed by an invigorating shower. He could shave, too, and change his shirt. His last chance of getting in trim again.

His ablutions proved a wonder-working tonic; he left the bathroom feeling a new man. Hastening to the cloak-room, he deposited his bag there, and set out determinedly on his quest.

Rain was coming down in torrents. He jumped into a street car bound citywards. It was barely eight, but the shops were already open, and many people up and about, silently going their busy ways, in raincoats and rubbers. Though there was no wheeled traffic in the street these people took care, he noticed, to keep to the pavements, which were crowded. "An industrious, levelheaded folk," he

observed to himself. Antoine was fond of quick generalizations. Helped by his map of Lausanne, he found his way to the little square beside the town hall. When he peered up at the belfry, it was striking half-past eight. The street where Jacques lived was at the far end of the square.

The Rue des Escaliers-du-Marché seemed to be one of the oldest streets in Lausanne. It was less a street, in fact, than a truncated alley, consisting of a steep ascent with houses only on the left. The little street climbed tier by tier; facing the houses rose a wall ribboned by an ancient wooden staircase, which was roofed over with medieval timberwork painted a purplish red. This sheltered staircase offered a convenient observation-post, of which Antoine took advantage. The few houses in the alley followed an irregular alinement; they were small and tumbledown, and the lower stories gave the impression of having served as small shops perhaps as far back as the sixteenth century. A low doorway, overweighted by its lavishly carved lintel, gave access to Number 10. On one of the panels was a weather-worn inscription: "Pension J. H. Kammerzinn." So that was where Jacques lived.

After those three weary years without news, after feeling that the whole world lay between him and his brother, the thought that in a few minutes he would see Jacques again came with an unexpected thrill. But Antoine had the knack of mastering emotion-—his profession had schooled him well—and as he summoned up his energy, his thoughts grew lucid, untouched by feeling. "Half-past eight," he said to himself. "He's at home presumably. Half-past eight—why, it's the usual time for police arrests! If he's in, I'll say I've an appointment and go straight into his room, unannounced." Screening his face with his umbrella, he crossed the street with a determined tread and climbed the two steps leading to the street-door.

A paved hall led up to an old-fashioned staircase, flanked by banisters; it was wide and well kept, but dark. There were no doors. Antoine began going up the stairs. Presently he heard a vague murmur of voices. When his head was above the level of the landing he saw, through the glass door of a dining-room, some ten or twelve boarders seated round a table. "Lucky the stairs are so dark," he thought. "They can't see me." Then: "The boarders are having their breakfast. *He* isn't there yet. He'll be coming down." And suddenly—yes, it was Jacques, his voice and intonation. He had just spoken. Jacques was there, living, large as life!

Antoine tottered and, gripped by a sudden panic, hastily retreated a few paces. His breath came in gasps; surging up from the depths, that rush of affection seemed flooding his lungs, suffocating him. A nuisance, all those strangers! What was he to do? Go away for a bit? No. He pulled himself together; as usual, difficulty was a spur to his energies. There must be no delay; he must act promptly. He could see Jacques's profile only now and then because of the people round him.

A little old man with a white beard was sitting at the head of the table; five or six men of various ages were in the other seats. Opposite the old man was a good-looking, fair-haired woman, still young, with a little girl on each side of her. Jacques was bending forward, speaking in quick, eager tones. He seemed at ease amongst these people. Antoine, whose presence hovered like an impending threat over his brother's peace of mind, was struck by the unawareness of what the next instant is to bring, the insouciance, that attends the most critical moments of a lifetime. The others seemed interested in the discussion, the old man was laughing; Jacques appeared to be holding his own against two youths sitting opposite him. Twice, to emphasize a remark, he made that commanding gesture with his right hand which Antoine had forgotten. Unexpectedly, after a swift exchange of repartee, he smiled. Jacques's smile!

Then, without more ado, Antoine went up the steps again, walked to the glazed door and softly opened it, taking off his hat.

Ten faces swung round towards his, but he did not see them. He did not see the little old man rising from his chair to put a startled question. Gay and resolute, his eyes were fixed on Jacques, and Jacques returned his brother's gaze, his pupils large with wonder, his lips half parted. Cut short in the midst of a remark, he still had on his frozen features the look of merriment that had accompanied it, changed to an odd grimace. The deadlock lasted only a few seconds; Jacques rose to his feet, with one idea in his head—above all, to pass it off and to avoid any appearance of a "scene."

With hurried steps, with a clumsy effusiveness meant to give the impression that his caller was expected, he walked straight up to Antoine, who, playing his part, moved back towards the landing. Jacques joined him there, then closed the door behind him. Neither was conscious of shaking hands, though they must have done so, automatically. Neither could utter a word.

Jacques seemed to hesitate, made an awkward gesture, as if inviting Antoine to follow, and began walking upstairs.

# VII

TWO, three flights of stairs. Jacques walked heavily up, clinging to the banisters, without looking back. Behind him, Antoine was feeling perfectly calm and collected; so much so that he was surprised at being so little moved. Indeed, there had been occasions in his life when he had asked himself not without a qualm: "What's one to make of a composure so easily come by? Is it presence of mind, or just absence of emotion, callousness?"

On the fourth floor there was one door only; Jacques opened it. Once they were in the room he turned the key, and for the first time looked his brother in the eyes.

"What do you want of me?" he asked in a low, grating voice.

But the truculence of his gaze could not stand up against Antoine's affectionate smile; under his geniality, Antoine was shrewdly biding his time, willing to temporize, but prepared to hold his own. Jacques lowered his eyes.

"What do you want of me?" he repeated. The tone was bitterly indignant, but tremulous with apprehension, almost plaintive. An' toine was surprised at feeling so little stirred by it. He had to feign emotion.

"Jacques!" he murmured, drawing nearer. While he played his part, he was studying his brother with keen, observant eyes. Jacques's commanding presence surprised him, as did his general aspect and expression, all so changed from what they once had been, from what he had imagined.

Jacques's eyebrows contracted. Vainly he tried to control his feelings; it was all he could do to keep his lips closed on the sobs that welled up from his heart. Then suddenly his ill-temper passed out in a deep sigh, he seemed to give up the struggle, and, yielding to his weakness, let his forehead sink on Antoine's shoulder.

"Oh, Antoine," he cried again, "what do they want of me? Tell me!"

Antoine had an intuition that he must answer at once, and strike hard.

"Father is in a very bad way. He is dying." After a pause he added: "That's why I've come to fetch you, old man."

Jacques had not flinched. So his father was dying? But why suppose that, in this new life he had carved out for himself, his father's death could affect him, draw him forth from his retreat, or change one jot of the circumstances that had compelled him to leave home. Nothing in what Antoine had just said had deeply moved him; nothing except the last two words, "old man!" What years since he had heard them!

The silence was so embarrassing that Antoine hastened to continue: "I'm all by myself." Then he had a sudden inspiration. "Mademoiselle doesn't count, of course, and Gise is away in England."

Jacques looked up. "In England?"

"Yes, she's at a convent near London, studying for a diploma, and can't get away. I'm all alone, and I want your help."

Though he was unaware of it, Jacques's dogged resistance had been shaken and, while as yet unformulated in his mind, the notion of a possible return had lost something of its sting. He drew away, took some faltering steps; then as if he preferred to let his mood of black despondency engulf him, he sank into the chair in front of his desk, burying his head in his hands, and broke into a storm of sobs. He did not feel the hand that Antoine laid on his shoulder. He was picturing this place of refuge he had so laboriously built up—in pride and solitude, stone by stone, during the past three years—falling in ruin. In the twilight of his thoughts there was enough clear vision left to confront the inevitable, to see that any resistance on his part was bound to fail, that sooner or later he would have to go home, and his glorious isolation, if not his freedom, had come to an end; that the wisest course was to come to terms with what must be. But his inability to resist made him choke with rankling despite.

Antoine had remained standing, keeping his eyes on his brother, in a thoughtful attitude, as though his affection were for the moment in abeyance. The sight of the bent back shaken with sobs brought to his mind Jacques's fits of despair in early youth; meanwhile, however, he was coolly weighing his chances. The longer the fit lasted, the better chance there was that Jacques would bring himself to yield. He had withdrawn his hand and, while he took stock of his surroundings, his brain was busy with a host of thoughts. The room, he noticed, was not merely clean, but also cosy. Though the low ceiling showed that it was a converted attic, it was well lit, spacious, and the colour-effect of limpid yellow was agreeable to the eye. Wax-hued and highly polished, the floor emitted faint crackling sounds, no doubt due to the heat from the little white porcelain stove in which a log-fire roared cheerfully. There were two easy chairs covered with a gay cretonne, and several tables strewn with newspapers and documents. Some books, not more than fifty in all, stood on a shelf above the still unmade bed. Not a single photograph, nothing to recall the past. Antoine's disapproval was tempered with a spice of envy.

He noticed that Jacques was growing calmer, and wondered if it meant that he had yielded, would come back to Paris. Actually, Antoine had always been certain he would carry out his project. And now that the flood-gates were open, a great wave of affection swept over him, an overpowering rush of love and pity; he would have liked to strain his unhappy young brother to his breast. Bending over the bowed back he whispered:

"Jacques!"

With a brusque movement Jacques swung himself erect. Furiously he dried his eyes and glared at his brother.

"Are you angry with me?" Antoine asked.

No reply.

"Father's dying, you know," he continued, as though to excuse himself.

Jacques looked away.

"When?" His tone was curt, almost indifferent, but his eyes were haggard. He realized what he had just said, when he caught Antoine's look.

"When," he murmured, staring at the floor, "when … do you want to start?"

"As soon as possible. His condition is alarming."

"Tomorrow?"

Antoine hesitated. "This evening, if it can be managed."

Their eyes met for a moment. Then Jacques shrugged his shoulders; tonight, tomorrow, what did it matter now?

"The night express then," he agreed in a toneless voice.

Antoine understood that *their* departure had been settled. But he was still awaiting what he had desired with all his heart; actually he felt neither pleasure nor surprise.

Both were standing now, in the centre of the room. No sound came from the street; they might have been in the heart of the country. Rain was streaming down the steep-pitched roof, and sudden gusts of wind came whistling under the loose tiles. And every moment the tension between them was increasing.

Antoine had a feeling that Jacques wished to be alone.

"I expect you've plenty to do," he said. "I'll go out for a bit."

Jacques flushed. "Plenty to do? No; why should I?" Hastily he sat down again.

"Quite sure?"

Jacques shook his head.

"In that case," Antoine remarked with a cordiality that rang false, "I'll sit down too. We've lots to say to each other."

What he really wanted was to ask questions, but his courage failed him. To gain time he launched out into a detailed and, despite himself, technical account of the various phases of their father's illness. These details did not merely recall to his mind a hopeless case; they summoned up the sick-room, the bed, and the dying, swollen, pain-racked body on it, the convulsed features and the piteous cries wrung from an agony which it was almost impossible to subdue. And it was Antoine's voice now that trembled with emotion, while Jacques, hunched up in his chair, stared at the stove with a look of stubborn aloofness, as if to say: "Father is dying, and you've come to drag me away—well and good, I'll go. But ask no more of me." At one moment Antoine fancied he saw Jacques unbend a little from his impassibility. It was when he described how he had heard through the door the sick man and Mademoiselle singing together the old nursery song. Jacques remembered the "pretty pony" and, while his eyes remained fixed on the stove, a slow smile formed on his lips. A wan, faraway smile—exactly the smile he used to have as a little boy.

But, almost immediately after, when Antoine said in conclusion: "After all the suffering he's been through, it will be a happy release," Jacques, who till then had not said a word, remarked in a harsh, incisive voice:

"For us, undoubtedly."

Antoine was too profoundly shocked to answer. In Jacques's callous attitude there was, he realized, a good deal of bravado, but behind it was only too apparent an animosity that would not be disarmed, and this hatred for a sorely afflicted, dying man was more than Antoine could stomach. To his mind it was unjust and, to say die least of it, quite ill-timed, as things were now. He remembered the evening when M. Thibault had shed tears, accusing himself of being responsible for his son's suicide. Nor could he forget the effect Jacques's disappearance had had on the old man's health. Grief and remorse might well have played a part in bringing on the nervous depression which had enabled the malady to take root, and but for which the present complications would perhaps not have developed so rapidly.

Then, as if he had been waiting impatiently for his brother to finish speaking, Jacques stood up abruptly and burst out with the question:

"How did you find out where I was?"

Evasion was impossible.

"Oh, through—through Jalicourt."

"Jalicourt!" It seemed as if this was the last name he had expected. He repeated it syllable by syllable, incredulously: "Ja-li-court?"

Antoine, who had taken out his pocket-book, quietly handed to his brother the letter from Jalicourt which he had opened. This seemed the simplest course; no verbal explanations would be needed.

Jacques took the letter and glanced over its contents; then, going to the window, he perused it carefully, his eyes half hidden by the lids, and his lips tight-set, inscrutable.

Antoine was observing him. Surely Jacques's face, which three years earlier had still the undecided features of an adolescent, should not, clean-shaven as it was, now seem so very different? He scanned it with interest, puzzled to define exactly how it had changed. He found in it more energy, less pride, and less unrest as well; less obstinacy and more self-reliance. Jacques had certainly lost his charm, but he had gained in physique. His build was almost stocky; his shoulders had widened, and his head, which had grown larger, seemed set too low between them. Jacques had a way of holding his head well back—giving an impression of pugnacity, not to say of arrogance. His under-j aw was formidable, and, for all their melancholy droop, the lines of his mouth were firm and forceful. What particularly struck Antoine was the changed expression of Jacques's mouth. His complexion was as pale as ever, with a few freckles over the cheek-bones. Jacques's hair had changed colour—its auburn tint had darkened into brown—and, growing in a thick, unruly mop, it made the resolute features seem more massive still. A lock of hair, dark brown with glints of gold, which Jacques was always pushing back impatiently, kept falling over his forehead, shadowing a portion of it.

Antoine saw the forehead twitching; two deep furrows had formed between Jacques's brows. He realized what a shock there must be for Jacques in all the thoughts that letter was evoking, nor was he in the least surprised when, letting the hand that held the letter drop to his side, his brother turned to him and muttered:

"I suppose you … you, too, have read my story?"

Antoine's only answer was a flutter of the eyelashes. The affection in his gaze—he was smiling less with his lips than with his eyes — gradually got the better of his brother's vexation. When Jacques spoke again it was in a less aggressive tone.

"And who … who else has read it?"

"No one."

Jacques looked incredulous.

"No one else, I assure you," Antoine said emphatically.

Jacques thrust his hands into his pockets, and said nothing. As a matter of fact, he was rapidly getting used to the thought that his brother had read "*La Sorellina*," and would even have liked to hear his opinion of it. Personally, he was severe in his judgment of this' work, written in a mood of fiery exaltation, but a year and a half earlier. He believed he had made vast strides since that period, and., he now found unbearable its experimentalism and lyrical effusion, its juvenile exuberance. The oddest thing was that he did not give a thought to its theme, so far as that theme was linked up with his own life. Once he had transmuted past. experience into terms of art, he felt that he had got it definitely out of his system. Nowadays, whenever he chanced to think of those troublous times, it was to tell; himself at once: "I've got over all that, thank goodness!"

Thus, when Antoine had said: "I've come to fetch you," his first response had been to reassure himself: "Anyhow, I've got over all that," following it up With: "What's more, Gise is away, in England." For, if need be, he could bear with being reminded of Gise, and hearing her name; only of the faintest allusion to Jenny was be fanatically intolerant.

For a moment he stood unmoving, silent, in front of the window, gazing into the distance. Then he turned again.

"Who knows that you've come here?"

"No one."

This time he insisted. "What about Father?"

"I tell you, he knows nothing."

"And Gise?"

"No. Nobody knows." To reassure his brother still further; Antoine added: "After what happened, and as Gise is in London, it's best for her to know nothing, for the present."

Jacques was watching his brother; the glint of an unspoken question flickered in his eyes, died out.

Again there was a silence—Antoine had come to dread these silences; unfortunately, the greater his desire to break the tension, the more an opening eluded him. Obviously a host of questions suggested themselves, but he dared not voice them. He kept on groping for some harmless, neutral topic which might pave the way for greater intimacy; no such theme presented itself.

The tension was growing strained to breaking-point when suddenly Jacques threw the window open, then stepped back from it. A superb Siamese tom-cat, with dusky muzzle and thick, cream-brown coat, sprang lithely down to the floor.

"Ah, a visitor!" Antoine exclaimed with relief.

Jacques smiled. "A friend.' And the nicest kind of friend, an intermittent one."

"Where does he come from?"

"I've not been able to find out. From some distance, I imagine. No one in our street knows anything about him."

The handsome cat made a lordly circuit of the room, purring like a musical top.

"Your friend is soaked through," Antoine observed; he felt that dreaded silence on the point of closing in again.

"Yes," Jacques said, "he usually honours me with a visit when it's raining. Sometimes as late as midnight. He scratches on the pane, jumps in, and gives himself a cleaning in front of the stove. Once he's done, he asks to be let out. I've never persuaded him to let me stroke him, still less to feed him."

After his inspection of the room, the cat went back towards the window, which was still ajar.

"Look!" Jacques said almost cheerfully. "He didn't expect to find you here; he's off again."

The cat sprang lightly onto the zinc windowsill and, without a look behind, was off along the tiles.

"Your protégé is rather tactless," Antoine remarked half in earnest, "rubbing it into me like that, that I'm an intruder."

Jacques went up to the window and shut it; a pretext for not replying. But when he turned round, his cheeks were scarlet. He fell to pacing slowly up and down the room.

Silence again, uneasy, hostile silence.

As a last resort, presumably in the hope of changing Jacques's attitude, and because his mind was haunted by thoughts of the dying man, Antoine began speaking again of his father. He laid stress on the changes that had come over M. Thibault's character since the operation, and went so far as to observe:

"You'd judge him differently, perhaps, if you'd seen how he has aged, as I have, during these last three years."

"Perhaps," Jacques replied evasively.

But Antoine was not to be discouraged so easily.

"In any case," he went on, "I've often wondered if you and I ever really understood what sort of man he is, at bottom." It struck him that, while on this subject, he might describe to Jacques a little incident which had happened to him quite recently. "You remember that hairdresser, Faubois, don't you, in front of our place, next door to the cabinet-maker's, just before you turn into the Rue du Pré aux Clercs?"

Jacques, who was walking to and fro with lowered eyes, stopped short. Faubois … that little side-street! It was like the sudden, blinding inrush of a world he had fancied out of mind for ever, into the dark seclusion he had deliberately sought. How vividly it all came back, down to the smallest detail: each slab of the sidewalk, every shop-front, the old cabinet-maker with his fingers stained walnut-brown, the gaunt-faced man and his daughter who kept the curiosity shop, and then "our place" (as Antoine called it), with its carriage entrance always kept ajar, and the concierge's quarters on the ground floor, and Lisbeth, and, further back in time, all the childhood he had abjured: Lisbeth, his first experience. In Vienna he had known another Lisbeth, whose husband had killed himself out of jealousy. Suddenly he remembered he must warn Sophia, old Kammerzinn's daughter, that he was leaving.

Antoine was going on with his anecdote.

One day, Jacques gathered, being pressed for time, his brother had dropped in at Faubois's shop for a shave. The brothers had always refused to give their patronage to Faubois, because this hairdresser had for twenty years had their father's custom, trimming his beard each Saturday. The old man, who knew Antoine well by sight, had at once begun talking to him about M. Thibault. And, little by little, Antoine, as he listened absent-mindedly, a towel round his neck, found, to his amazement, the old barber's gossip blocking out a portrait of his father far different from any he had anticipated. "For instance," Antoine said, "he was always talking about us to Faubois. About you, especially. Faubois well remembers the day when 'M. Thibault's boy'—that's you—passed his 'matric.' As he was going by, Father pushed the shop-door open and announced: 'M. Faubois, my boy's' got through his exam.'

‘Pleased as Punch, your old dad was that day; it did one good to see it!’ That’s how Faubois put it. Surprising, isn’t it? But what staggers me most is what’s been happening—the change—in these last three years.”

A slight frown had settled on Jacques’s face; Antoine wondered if he were not blundering. Still, he had gone too far to stop.

“Yes. Ever since you left. I discovered finally that Father had never let the truth leak out, that he’d made up a whole yarn to hoodwink everybody. Here’s the sort of thing Faubois said to me that day: ‘There’s nothing like foreign travel. Your father did well to send his young son abroad, seeing he had the money to pay for it. Why, with the mails, there ain’t no trouble nowadays getting letters from anywhere on earth, and your father, he told me he got a letter each week from his boy, regular as clockwork.’ ”

Antoine refrained from looking at Jacques, and decided to sheer off these memories that touched him too nearly.

“Father used to talk to him about me, too. ‘My elder boy will be a professor at the Medical School one of these days.’ About Mademoiselle, too, and the maids. Faubois knows all about the household. About Gise, as well. By the way, that’s a curious thing; it seems that Father talked quite a lot about Gise. I gathered that Faubois used to have a daughter of about the same age; I believe she’s dead. He wbuld say to Father: ‘My girl does so and so,’ and Father’d cap it with: ‘My girl does so and so.’ Would you believe it? Faubois reminded me of a great many things I’d forgotten and Father’d told’ him of—childish pranks, things Gise said when she was little. Arid; there’s something else. I can quote the exact words Faubois used:’ ‘Your dad was always sorry he hadn’t had a daughter. “But,” he says to me, “this little girl she’s just like a daughter to me.“ ‘ Exactly that! Well, I tell you I was simply staggered! Yes, under all his gruffness Father had a heart—shy, perhaps, and over-sensitive—that no one ever dreamt of.”

Without a word, without once looking up, Jacques was still walking to and fro; though he rarely glanced in his brother’s direction,: none of Antoine’s movements escaped him. He was not stirred emotionally, but he was torn by violent, contradictory impulses. What: was most painful to him by far was the feeling that the past was breaking into his life inevitably, whether by force or with his fred consent.

Confronted by Jacques’s silence, Antoirie was losing heart; it seemed quite futile trying to get a conversation under way. He kept a. close; watch on his brother’s face, hoping against hope to catch some gleam of a responsive thought. But all he saw was gloomy, stubborn indifference. And yet he could not bring himself to feel resentful. Even with its aloofness from him, for all its dourness, that was the face he loved more than all other faces, his brother’s. And once again, though he; dared not betray it by word or gesture, a wave of deep affection swept over him.

But now. silence had set in again, oppressive, ineluctable. The only sounds were the ripple of water in the gutters, the crackling of the fire, and now and then the creak of a loose board as Jacques stepped on it.

Going up to the stove, he opened it and put in two logs: as he crouched before it, almost on his knees, he turned to his brother, who was following him with his eyes, and muttered in a surly tone:

“You judge me harshly. But I don’t care; you’re wrong.”

“But I don’t judge you, Jacques,”. Antoine hastened to put in.

“I’ve a perfect right to be happy in my own way,” Jacques went on. He drew himself up with a quick jerk, was silent for a moment, then added through his clenched teeth: “And here I’ve been completely happy.”

Antoine bent forward. “Do you really mean that?”

“Yes. Completely.”

After each remark they gazed intently at each other for a moment. In their eyes was curiosity, but behind it loyalty, the deeper for its reticence.

“I believe you,” Antoine said. “In any case, your leaving home … Still, there are so many things that I … well, that puzzle me.” He made haste to add: “Don’t think I want to blame you in the least, my dear Jacques. . , .”

Then for the first time Jacques noticed his brother’s smile. The Antoine he remembered had been so painfully strenuous, so aggressively die man of action, that the charm of the changed smile came as a surprise. Perhaps fearing to yield to his emotion, he clenched his fists and made a gesture of annoyance.

“Oh, Antoine, stop it! Don’t talk about that any more!” Then, as if to qualify his outburst, added: “For the present.” A look of real distress passed over his face; turning towards a dark corner of the room, he said in a low, veiled voice: “You don’t, you can’t possibly understand… .”

They were silent again, but the oppressiveness had lifted from the air.

Antoine rose and, in a casual tone which he was none the less careful not to overdo, inquired: “Don’t you smoke? I’m dying for a cigarette, if you don’t mind.” He felt it necessary to keep the situation on an undramatic level; gradually, by cordiality and easy manners, to wean his brother from his churlishness.

He took a few puffs at his cigarette, then went to the window. Below him he saw the roofs of old Lausanne cataracting down towards the lake in an inextricable tangle of black humps and ridges, the outlines of which blurred into the vapour steaming off them. Coated with lichen, the tiled roofs looked sodden as rain-drenched felt. A range of mountains with the light behind them fretted the far horizon, their snow-caps gleaming white against the drab grey sky, and long pale streaks trailing down the leaden-hued slopes. It was as if a range of black volcanoes had erupted milk, depositing a creamy lava.

Jacques went up to him.

“Those are the Dents d’Oche,” he said, pointing towards the snow-caps.

Falling away in tiers, the city masked the nearer bank, and against the light the further shore loomed through the veil of rain like a sheer cliff of darkness.

“So much for your charming lake!” Antoine remarked. “Today it looks more like the Channel in a squall.”

Jacques vouchsafed a fleeting smile. He stayed at the window, unmoving, unable to take his eyes off the far bank; lost in a daydream, he was picturing its green woods and villages, the fleets of little boats moored along the piers, the winding paths leading to rustic inns perched on the mountainside. There he had wandered, lived adventurously, and now he was to leave it all—for how long? he wondered.

Antoine tried to divert his attention. “I’m sure you’ve heaps to do this morning. Especially if …” He was going to say: “… if we’re to leave tonight,” but thought better of it.

Jacques shook his head pettishly. “No, I’ve nothing to do. I tell you I’m quite independent. Everything’s as simple as daylight when one lives alone, when one keeps … free.” The word seemed to linger on the air after he had spoken it. Then the cheerfulness went out of his voice; gazing fixedly at his brother, he sighed: “But of course you can’t understand.”

Antoine wondered what sort of life Jacques might be leading at Lausanne. “There’s his writing, obviously. But what does he live on?” He made some guesses at it, then by way of giving expression to his thoughts, remarked in a careless tone:

“Really, now that you’ve come of age, you might have claimed your share of what Mother left us.”

A gleam of amusement lit Jacques’s eyes. He all but put a question. For a moment he felt a slight regret; yes, on occasion, there’d been jobs he would have gladly forgone! At the Tunis docks, in the Adriatica basement at Trieste, in the Deutsche Buchdruckerei at Innsbruck. But the feeling passed at once, and the thought that M. Thibault’s death would make him definitely well off did not even cross his mind. No! He did not need them, or their money. He could stand on his own feet.

“How do you manage?” Antoine ventured to ask. “Have you any trouble in earning enough to live on?”

Jacques cast a glance round the room. “You can see for yourself,” he said.

Antoine could not refrain from asking a direct question: “But what exactly do you do?”

The stubborn, secretive look came back to Jacques’s face. His brows knitted, then grew smooth again.

“Don’t imagine,” Antoine hastened to explain, “that I’m trying to poke my nose into your affairs. There’s only one thing I want, old man, and that’s for you to make the most of your life, to be happy.”

“Happy!” Jacques sounded almost startled. It was as if he had said: “I—happy? What an idea!” Then hastily he added in an exasperated tone: “Oh, please drop it, Antoine. You’d never really understand.” He tried to smile, took a few uncertain steps, then went back to the window and stared vaguely out across the lake. Seemingly unconscious that it contradicted his exclamation of a moment past, he murmured: “I’ve been completely happy here. Completely!”

He glanced at his watch and, without giving Antoine time to put in another word, remarked:

“I’d better introduce you to old Kammerzinn. And to his daughter, if she’s in. Then we’ll go and have lunch. Not here; somewhere outside.” He had opened the stove again and was replenishing it as he spoke. “He used to be a tailor. Now he’s a town-councillor. A keen trade-unionist too. He has started a weekly paper, which he runs almost single-handed. A very decent old fellow, you’ll see.”

They found Kammerzinn sitting in his overheated office. He was in his shirt-sleeves, busy correcting proofs. The old man wore curious rectangular glasses with gold stems, supple as hairs, coiling round his small, fleshy ears. Sharp-witted for all his air of guilelessness, inclined to rant, but with a redeeming twinkle in his eye, he had a way of looking his interlocutor full in the face, above the gold-rimmed lenses, chuckling to himself the while. He sent for beer at once. He started by addressing Antoine as “My dear sir”; a moment later it was “My dear boy.”

Jacques informed him briefly that his father’s health obliged him to absent himself “for some time”; he was leaving that night, but would keep his room, paying the month’s rent in advance, and would leave “all his things” in it. Antoine heard without moving a muscle.

Waving in the air the sheets he was correcting, old Kammerzinn launched into a voluble harangue about a project for co-operative printing of the various party newspapers. Jacques seemed interested and put in suggestions. Antoine listened. It looked as if Jacques were in no hurry to be alone with him again. Or was he waiting for someone who did not appear?

At last he made a move.

# VIII

OUT in the street a bitter wind was blowing, driving before it flurries of melting snow.

"It's turned to sleet," Jacques said.

He was trying to be less taciturn. As they walked down a flight of wide stone steps flanking a public building, he volunteered the information that this was the university. His tone implied a certain pride in the city of his choice. Antoine duly admired. But the alternating blasts of icy rain and snow made them little inclined to linger out of doors.

At the junction of two narrow streets, thronged with pedestrians and cyclists, Jacques made straight for a row of large windows along the sidewalk; the only indication of the nature of the premises was an inscription on the glass entrance-door in white capitals:

GASTRONOMICA.

Panelled in old oak, the interior gleamed everywhere with beeswax. The proprietor—a fat, active, red-faced man, puffing and blowing but obviously well pleased with himself, his health, his staff and cheer—was fussing round his customers, treating them all like unexpected guests. The walls were covered with gothic letter inscriptions such as *Our motto: Honest Food, not Chemicals, and At Gastronomica, no dry Mustard on the Rims of Mustard-Pots.*

Jacques, who since the interview with Kammerzinn and his walk in the rain had been seeming less on edge, smiled amiably at his brother's amused interest. It was quite a surprise to him to find Antoine so eager to observe the world around him, taking stock so zestfully of every little touch of "local colour," so avid of peculiarities.

In earlier days, when the brothers happened to dine together in the restaurants of the Latin Quarter, Antoine had never noticed anything; the first thing he had always done was to prop some medical journal against the water bottle on the table.

Antoine was conscious that Jacques was watching him.

"Do you find me changed?" he asked.

Jacques made an evasive gesture. As a matter of fact Antoine seemed to him greatly changed. But how? Most likely during the past three years he had forgotten many of his brother's traits; now he was rediscovering them one by one. The way Antoine squared his shoulders, spread his fingers out when he was making an explanation, the flicker of his eyelids—each little movement suddenly came back to him; it was like coming on a once familiar picture the memory of which had vanished with the years. But there were other characteristics that baffled him, for they did not fit in with anything remembered: the general expression of his face, his attitude, his calmness and conciliatory disposition, the absence of hardness and impatience in his eyes. All that was new to Jacques. He tried to explain it in a few stumbling phrases. Antoine smiled. That was Rachel's doing. For several months that passionate adventure had stamped his face—till now inapt for any show of happiness—with a kind of gay self-confidence, even, perhaps, the complacence of the favoured lover; and those months had left their trace for good.

The food was excellent, the beer light and well iced, the atmosphere congenial. Antoine displayed a cheerful interest in the local characteristics; he had noticed that his uncommunicative brother unbent more readily when talking on such subjects. All the same, whenever Jacques opened his mouth he seemed to be flinging himself, desperately, into the conversation. The words came with an obvious effort, in jerks; then, on occasion, for no apparent reason, they would pour out in a torrent, cut by sudden silences. And all the time his eyes were boring into Antoine's.

"No, Antoine!" he exclaimed. His brother had just made a humorous comment. "You're quite wrong if you think … I mean it's not fair to say the Swiss are like that. I've seen a lot of other countries, and I can assure you …"

The involuntary look of curiosity on Antoine's face cut him short. Presently, perhaps regretting the access of ill-humour, he went on, of his own accord.

"That fellow over there, on our right, is far more typical, really. I mean the one who's talking to the proprietor. A pretty good specimen of the Swiss man in the street. His look, his way of behaving, his voice …"

"Which sounds," Antoine put in, "as if he had a cold in the head."

"No!" Jacques expostulated with a slight frown. "It's a rather slow, drawling voice, the voice of someone who thinks deeply. But what's most striking is his look of being sufficient unto himself, always minding his own business. That's thoroughly Swiss. Also that air of feeling secure, always and everywhere."

"He has intelligent eyes," Antoine conceded, "but, oh, what a lack of any sort of animation!"

"Well, at Lausanne there are thousands and thousands like him; from morn till night, without wasting a second, without fluster, doing what they have to do. They may run up against other modes of life, but they take no part in them. They rarely cross their frontiers; at every instant of their lives they are wholly taken up with what they're doing or will do a moment later."

Antoine listened without interrupting; his attentiveness rather intimidated Jacques, but encouraged him too. And it gave him a secret feeling of importance which made him more loquacious.

"You talked of animation just now," he said. "People think the Swiss are 'heavy.' That's easily said, but false. They've a different mentality from—from yours. More compact, perhaps. Almost as supple, when in action. Not heavy—but *stable*. Which is a very different thing."

"What surprises me," Antoine said, taking a cigarette from his case, "is to see you of all people so much at home in this hive of industry."

"Why shouldn't I be?" Jacques moved aside the empty cup he had just missed upsetting. "I've lived everywhere, you know; in Italy, Germany, Austria …"

Antoine, his eyes fixed on his match, ventured to add, without looking up:

"And in England?"

"No. Why in England?"

For a moment, in silence, each tried to read the other's thoughts. Antoine was still looking down. Puzzled though he was, Jacques went on:

"Well, I'm sure I'd never have been able to settle down in any of those countries. It's impossible to work in them. One's always at fever-heat. This is the only place where I've found my equilibrium."

Indeed, just then he seemed to have achieved a certain poise. He was sitting aslant, in what seemed to be a frequent attitude of his, with his head bent to one side, the side on which was the unruly lock—as if his brows were overburdened by the mass of hair. His right shoulder was thrust forward. All the upper portion of his body seemed buttressed by his right arm, with its hand solidly planted on his thigh. His left elbow rested lightly on the table and the fingers of the left hand were toying with the bread-crumbs on the cloth. It was a man's hand now, sinewy, expressive.

He was thinking over what he had just said. "Yes, these people are restful." There was a note of gratitude in his voice. "Obviously, that stolidity of theirs is only on the surface. There are passions in the air here, as in other countries. But, you see, emotions which, day in, day out, are so well kept in hand aren't very dangerous. Not so contagious, I mean." Suddenly he flushed, and added in a low voice: "For in these last three years, you know …"

He paused, flicked back the lock of hair with a quick gesture, and shifted his position.

Antoine did not stir, but swept his eyes over his brother's downcast face. In his look there was a tacit invitation; at last, perhaps, Jacques was going to say something about himself.

Deliberately Jacques changed the subject, rising from the table.

"It's still pouring," he said. "But we'd better be getting back, hadn't we?"

As they were leaving the restaurant, a passing cyclist jumped off his machine and ran up to Jacques.

"Have you seen anyone from over there?" he panted, without a word of greeting. The mountaineer's cape which he was wresting from the wind, with his arms locked tightly over his chest, was drenched.

"No," Jacques replied, without betraying any sign of surprise. "Let's go in there," he added, pointing to a building, the street-door of which stood open. Antoine, out of discretion, lingered behind; Jacques, however, turned and called to him. Still, when they were together in the doorway, he made no introductions.

With a toss of his head the cyclist jerked back the hood covering his eyes. He was a man in the thirties and, despite the somewhat abrupt way in which he had accosted them, his expression was mild, almost over-affable. His face was reddened by the biting wind, and across it ran a streak of livid white, the trace of an old scar that, half closing his right eye, slanted up across the eyebrow and disappeared under his hat-brim.

"They're always falling foul of me," he said in an excited tone, paying no heed to Antoine's presence. "And I don't deserve that, do I now?" He seemed to attach particular importance to Jacques's verdict. Jacques made a calming gesture. "Why do they go on like that? They say it was done by paid agents. Why blame me? Anyhow, now they've cleared out, they know they won't be informed against."

"Their scheme can't work out," Jacques said decisively, after a moment's thought. "It's a choice of two things, either , . ."

"Yes, yes," the man broke in, with a fervour, a thankfulness, that came as a surprise. "Yes, that's exactly it! Only we must mind the political papers don't upset the apple cart before we're ready."

"Sabakin will be off the moment he scents trouble," Jacques replied, lowering his voice. "So will Bisson, you'll see."

"Bisson? Well, possibly."

"But—how about those revolvers?"

"Oh, that's easily accounted for. Her former lover bought them at Basel, when a gunsmith's shop was sold out after the owner's death."

"Look here, Rayer," Jacques said. "You mustn't count on me for the present; I can't do any writing from here for some time to come. Go and see Richardley. Get him to hand over the papers to you. Tell him you're acting for me. If he needs a signature, he can ring up MacLair. Got it?"

Rayer clasped Jacques's hand without replying.

"What about Loute?" Jacques asked, still holding Rayer's hand.

Rayer dropped his eyes. "I can't do anything about it," he replied with a timid laugh. Then, looking up, he muttered ragefully: "No, I can't do a thing. I love her."

Jacques dropped Rayer's hand, was silent for a moment, then said gruffly: "And where's it all going to land you, the two of you?"

Rayer sighed. "It was such a terribly hard birth, she'll never get over it; anyhow, never well enough to do any work."

"Do you know what she said to me?" Jacques broke in. " 'If I had an ounce of pluck, there'd be a way out, sure enough.' "

"There you are! That's how it is, and I can't do a thing, not a thing about it!"

"What about Schneebach?"

The man made an angry gesture, and a gleam of hatred kindled in his eyes.

Jacques's fingers closed tightly on Rayer's arm.

"Where will all that land you, Rayer?" he repeated sternly.

The other man gave an impatient jerk of his shoulders. Jacques withdrew his hand. There was a pause, then Rayer raised his right arm with a certain solemnity.

"For us, as for them, death is waiting round the corner—and that's all there is to it," he said in a low voice. Then added with a little soundless laugh, as if what he was going to say was childishly self-evident: "Otherwise the living would be the dead, and the dead alive!"

Gripping his bicycle by the seat, he swung it up with one arm. The scar across his face turned an angry red. Then he drew the hood of his cape over his face, like a cowl, and held out his hand.

"Thanks. I'll see Richardley. You're damned decent, Baulthy, one of the best." He sounded cheerful, sure of himself again. "Yes, just meeting you almost reconciles me with the world—with men and books, even the newspapers. *Au revoir*."

Though he had not the least idea what it was all about, Antoine had not missed a word of the conversation. From the start he had been struck by the attitude of the man who had just left them. He was obviously a good deal older than Jacques, yet treated him with the affectionate deference usually shown to seniors. But what had most impressed, indeed dumbfounded, him during the interview was the change in Jacques's appearance; not only had the wrinkles left his forehead, not only was no trace of sulkiness left, but he gave an impression of ripened wisdom and even authority. For Antoine it was a revelation. For some minutes he had had a glimpse of an entirely unknown Jacques, of whose existence he had never had an inkling—yet this undoubtedly was the real Jacques for all the world, the Jacques of today.

Rayer had mounted his bicycle, and, without troubling to bid Antoine goodbye, rode off between two sudden spurts of mud.

# IX

THE two brothers moved on; Jacques did not volunteer the slightest comment on this meeting. In any case, the wind which forced its way under their clothes and seemed bent especially on playing havoc with Antoine's umbrella, made any attempt at conversation almost hopeless.

Just when things were at their worst, however, as they came out into the Place de la Riponne—a spacious esplanade where all the winds of heaven seemed to be running riot—Jacques, impervious to the pelting rain, suddenly slackened his pace and asked:

"Tell me, when we were at the restaurant just now, what led you to mention England?"

Antoine was conscious of an aggressive intent behind the question. Ill at ease, he mumbled a few vague words which were swept away by the wind.

"What did you say …?" Jacques had not caught a single word. He had drawn closer and was walking crab-wise, thrusting his shoulder forward like a prow breasting the wind-stream. The questioning look he bent upon his brother was so insistent that Antoine, brought to bay, scrupled to tell a lie.

"Well—er—on account of the red roses, you know," he confessed.

The tone in which he spoke was rougher than he had intended it to be. Again the memory of Giuseppe and Annetta's passion had forced itself upon his thoughts; he seemed to see her stumbling, falling upon the grass, and the attendant horde of visions, only too familiar now, yet unbearable as ever, surged through his imagination. Annoyed and irritable, raging against each gust of wind that buffeted him, he swore aloud and angrily shut his umbrella.

Dumbfounded, Jacques had come to a sudden halt; he was evidently far from expecting such an answer. Then, biting his lips, he took a few steps without saying a word… . How often had he not already lamented that moment of incredible sentimentality, and regretted the sending of that basket of roses, bought abroad through an obliging friend—an incriminating message, proclaiming to all and sundry: "I am alive and my thoughts are with you"—at the very time when he wished to be looked upon as dead and buried, by all his family! But it had at least been possible for him, until now, to believe that his rash act had been kept a profound secret. Such in-discreetness on the part of Gise, unexpected and incomprehensible as it was for him, provoked him beyond measure. Nor could he now restrain his bitterness.

"You've missed your calling," he sneered. "You were born to be a detective!"

Annoyed by the tone in which he was addressed, Antoine flared up.

"Look here," he replied; "when a man's so keen on keeping his private life a secret, he should not flaunt it publicly in the pages of a magazine."

Stung to the quick, Jacques shouted in his face:

"Really! Do you mean to say it was my story that informed you of my sending those flowers?"

Antoine was no longer master of himself.

"No," he replied, with feigned composure, and added in a biting voice, spacing the syllables: "But, anyhow, it did enable me to appreciate the full meaning of the gift."

Having launched this retort, he forged ahead in the teeth of the wind.

But, immediately, the feeling of having blundered past recall came over him so overpoweringly that it took his breath away. Just a few words too many and everything was in jeopardy: he would now lose Jacques once for all… . Why had he suddenly lost control of himself, given way to that outburst of temper? Because Gise was concerned, most likely. And what was to be done now? Have it out with Jacques, apologize to him? Probably it was too late. Well, he could only try; he was prepared to make all possible amends.

He was about to turn to his brother and as affectionately as possible admit he was in the wrong, when suddenly he felt Jacques lay hold of his arm and cling to him with all his might: an impassioned, utterly unexpected hug, a rough, brotherly embrace, doing away in one second not only with the acid remarks that had passed between them, but also with the whole of the three long silent years they had spent apart from each other. Then a broken voice faltered, close to Antoine's ear.

"Why, Antoine, what can you have imagined? Did you really suppose that Gise … that I …? You thought that possible? You must be dreaming!"

They gazed deep into each other's eyes. Jacques's were sorrowful now, and younger-looking; and over his cheeks offended modesty sent a wave of indignation to mingle with his sorrow. To Antoine it came as an all-healing revelation. Joyfully he pressed his brother's arm against his side. Had he really suspected the two young people? He could no longer tell. He thought of Gise with intense emotion; and a sense of relief, of deliverance, of splendid happiness, came over him. At last he had found his long-lost brother.

Jacques remained silent. A flood of painful memories had come back to him: that evening at Maisons-Laffitte, when he had discovered both the love of Gise and the unconquerable physical attraction she awoke in him—that brief, shrinking kiss, snatched in the dark under the lime-trees, the girl's romantic gesture as she strewed rose-petals over the spot where that shy token of love had passed between them.

Antoine, too, was silent. He would have liked to say something, but he felt tongue-tied and self-conscious. He did, however, attempt by a pressure of his arm to convey to Jacques some such message as: "Yes, I've been a damned fool—and how glad it makes me!" His brother reciprocated the pressure. And they understood each other better, that way, than by the spoken word.

They walked on, arm in arm, under the rain. The over-affectionate, unduly prolonged contact was making both of them uncomfortable, but neither dared to be the first to break away. Then, as they came under cover of a wall that screened them from the wind, Antoine put up his umbrella again; thus it seemed as though they had drawn together for the shelter it afforded.

They reached the boarding-house without having spoken another word. But just outside the door, Antoine stopped short, unlinked his arm, and observed in a natural voice:

"Jacques, you surely have lots of things to attend to here. I'd better leave you, hadn't I? I'll take a stroll round the town."

"In this sort of weather?" Jacques asked. He was smiling, but Antoine had caught a fleeting hesitation. As a matter of fact, both dreaded spending the long afternoon together. "No," he added, "I've two or three letters to write, a twenty minutes' job, and perhaps a business call to pay before five. That's all." The prospect seemed to cast a gloom upon his features. With an effort he drew himself up. "Till then I'm quite free. Let's go upstairs."

While they were away, the room had been tidied up. There was a roaring fire in the stove. They helped each other off with their overcoats, hung them up to dry before the fire.

One of the windows had remained open. Antoine stepped over to it. Among the multitude of roofs sloping down to the lake a pinnacled tower rose high aloft, its tall spire coated with verdigris and gleaming under the rain. He pointed to it.

"That's Saint Francis's Church," Jacques said. "Can you make out the time?"

On one side of the steeple glowed a red-and-gold clock-face.

"A quarter past two."

"Lucky fellow! My eyesight's grown very bad. And I simply can't get used to wearing glasses, on account of my headaches."

"Your headaches!" Antoine exclaimed, closing the window. He turned round abruptly. His look of professional interrogation made Jacques smile.

"Why, yes, doctor. I had a spell of fearful headaches and I haven't quite got over them."

"What kind of headaches?"

"A throbbing there."

"Is it always on the left side?"

"No."

"Any dizziness? Any trouble with your eyes?"

"It's nothing, really." Jacques was beginning to be embarrassed by his brother's questions. "I'm much better, now."

"Better, be damned!" Antoine was not to be put off so easily. "Look here, I'll have to give you a thorough going-over… . Your digestion, for one thing, how's it working?"

Though he had obviously no intention of starting the going-over at once, he unconsciously came a step nearer Jacques, who could not help drawing back slightly. He was no longer used to having people fuss over him. The slightest attention seemed an encroachment on his independence. Almost at once, however, he began to remonstrate with himself. Indeed, his brother's concern had left behind it a comforting sensation, as though a gentle warmth had been breathed upon some secret fibre of his being that had long lain atrophied, inert.

"You never used to have any trouble of that kind in the old days," Antoine remarked. "How did it start?"

Jacques, who was sorry to have shrunk back as he had, did his best to answer, to explain things more clearly. But dare he tell the truth?

"It came on after some kind of illness; quite a sudden attack, it was—perhaps it was the flu, or it may have been a touch of malaria. … I was in the hospital about four weeks."

"In the hospital? Where?"

"At … Gabès."

"At Gabès? That's in Tunisia, isn't it?"

"Yes, I was delirious, it appears. For months afterwards I had frightful pains in my head."

Antoine made no reply, but he was obviously saying to himself: "What an idea, when one has a comfortable home of one's own in Paris, and is the brother of a doctor, to run the risk of dying like a dog in an African hospital!"

"What saved me," Jacques went on, hoping to turn the conversation into a different channel, "was fear. The fear of dying in that furnace-heat. I thought of Italy the way a shipwrecked sailor, on his raft, must think of land, of wells and running streams. … I had only one idea in my head: dead or alive to get on board the steamer, to escape to Naples."

Naples… . Antoine's thoughts reverted to Lunadoro, to Sybil, to Giuseppe's boating-trips in the Bay.

"Why Naples?" he ventured to ask.

Jacques flushed. He seemed to be struggling to say something by way of explanation; then his steel-blue eyes grew hard.

Antoine hastened to break the silence.

"What you needed, to my mind, was just rest, but in some bracing climate."

"To Naples, first," Jacques repeated. Obviously he had not been listening. "I had a letter of introduction to a man in the Consulate. You see, it's easier to get a postponement of one's military service when one is abroad." He straightened his shoulders. "And, besides, I'd rather have been reported as a deserter than go back to France to be cooped up in their barracks!"

Antoine gave no sign of disapproval. He changed the subject.

"But had you—had you the money for your fares?"

"What a question! That's you all over!"

He started walking up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"I was never very long without money, just enough to get along on, I mean. At first, of course, out there, I had to turn my hand to anything that cropped up."

He flushed again, and looked away. "Oh, that was for only a few days. You manage pretty soon, you know."

"But what on earth did you do?"

"Well, for instance, I used to give French lessons in an industrial training school. Then proofreading, at night, for the *Courrier Tunisien* and the *Paris-Tunis*. It often came in handy, my being able to write Italian as fluently as French. Fairly soon they began to publish articles of mine. Then I was given the press summary to do for a weekly, and the news items, all the odd jobs, in fact. And after that, as soon as I was able to manage it, I got a reporter's job." His eyes sparkled. "That was something like a job, and if only my health had held up, I'd still be at it. What a life! I remember, one day, at Viterbo … Look here, please sit down. No, personally I'd rather go on walking. I was sent to Viterbo, as no one else dared to go there, for that fantastic Camorra case—you remember that, I

suppose? In March 1911, it was. What an experience! I put up with some Neapolitans. A regular den of thieves, I must say. During the night of the thirteenth they all decamped. When the police turned up, I was sound asleep, alone in the house. I had to …"

He broke off in the middle of the sentence, in spite of Antoine's sustained attention—on account of it, perhaps. How could mere words convey even a faint idea of the breathless life he had led for months on end? Though his brother's questioning eyes urged him to go on, he dropped the thread of his reminiscences.

"How far away it all seems! Oh, let it go! Let's talk of something else… ."

He was conscious that these evocations of the past were laying their spell on him and, to break it, he forced himself to go on speaking He continued in a calm, detached voice:

"What were you asking me about? Ah, yes, those pains in my head. Well, you see, Italy in the spring never agreed with me. As soon as I was able, the moment I was free …" He stopped, frowning; once again, it seemed, he had come up against distressing memories. "As soon as I was able to get away from it all," he went on, with a violent swing of his arm, "I travelled north."

He had come to a stop, looking down at the stove, with his hands in his pockets.

"To Northern Italy?" his brother asked.

"No!" Jacques exclaimed. A tremor ran through his body. "Vienna, Budapest; then Saxony, Dresden. And after that, Munich."

His face suddenly became overcast; this time he darted a sharp glance at his brother and seemed to be really on the verge of speaking out; his lips moved slightly. But after a few seconds he made a wry face and, clenching his teeth so tightly that the last words were almost inaudible, muttered merely:

"Ah, Munich! Munich, too, is a dreadful place, simply appalling."

Antoine cut him short hastily.

"Anyhow, you should … Until we've ascertained the cause … Headache isn't a disease, of course, but only a symptom."

But Jacques was not listening and Antoine fell silent. Several times before, the same thing had happened; one could have sworn that Jacques suddenly felt the need to unbosom himself of some rankling secret, and then, all of a sudden, it seemed as if the words stuck in his throat, and he stopped short. And each time Antoine, inhibited by some absurd apprehension, instead of helping his brother over the jump, shied off the topic, turning away stupidly on a sidetrack.

He was wondering how he could best bring back Jacques into the main track, when a patter of light footsteps sounded on the staircase. There was a knock. The door half opened almost immediately, and Antoine had a glimpse of an untidy mop of hair and a boyish face.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! Am I in the way?"

"Come in," Jacques said, walking across the room.

On a better view, the caller proved to be not a boy, but an undersized clean-shaven man of no definite age, with a creamy-white complexion and tousled, tow-coloured hair. He hung back for a moment in the doorway, and seemed to dart a timorous glance towards Antoine, but the pale lashes fringing his eyes were so thick that the movements of the pupils were hidden.

"Come over to the stove," Jacques said, and helped the visitor off with his dripping overcoat.

Again he seemed set upon not introducing his brother. Still, he wore an entirely unconstrained smile, and appeared to be by no means put out by Antoine's presence.

"I came to tell you that Mithoerg has arrived. He is bringing a letter," the new-comer explained. He had a jerky, sibilant voice, but spoke now in a low, almost apprehensive tone.

"A letter?"

"From Vladimir Kniabrovski."

"From Kniabrovski!" Jacques exclaimed, his features lighting up.

"Sit down, you look tired. Will you have a glass of beer? Or a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you, nothing at all. Mithoerg arrived during the night. He has come from over there. … So what am I to do? What do you advise me to do? Shall I have a try?"

Jacques thought it over for some little time before answering.

"Yes. It's the only way of finding out now."

The other man grew excited.

"Great! I thought as much. Ignace advised me not to, and so did Chenavon. But you know better. Good work!"

He stood facing Jacques, his little face radiant with trustfulness.

"Only—watch out!" Jacques put in severely, lifting an admonitory finger.

The albino nodded assent.

"By kindness, that's the way," he declared solemnly. And iron determination was discernible in that frail body.

Jacques was observing him intently.

"You haven't been ill, have you, Vanheede?"

"No, no. Just a bit run down. I feel so uncomfortable, you know, in that big shanty of theirs!" he added with a wry smile.

"Is Prezel still here?"

"Yes."

"And Quilleuf? Tell Quilleuf from me that he talks too much. Just that, eh? He'll understand."

"Oh, Quilleuf! I told him straight: 'You behave, the lot of you, just as if you were the scum of the earth.' He tore up Rosengaard's proclamation without so much as reading it! Everything's putrid in that group. Yes, everything's putrid," he repeated in a hollow, indignant voice, while at the same time an indulgent, angelic smile lit up the girlish lips.

In a high-pitched sibilant tone he went on: "Saffrio! Tursey! Paterson! Every one of them. And even Suzanne! They stink of rottenness!"

Jacques shook his head.

"Josepha, perhaps, but not Suzanne. Josepha, mind you, is a despicable creature. She'll set you all by the ears."

Vanheede had been watching him silently, sliding his doll-like hands over his diminutive knees, bringing into view fantastically pale and fragile wrists.

"I know. But what is to be done about it? We can hardly consign her to the gutter at this time of day. Would you do that, tell me, now? Is that a reason? She's a human being, when all's said and done, and one who isn't bad through and through. And she has put herself under our protection, after all. Something can be done, surely. By kindness, perhaps, by kindness. How many such creatures haven't I met in the course of my life!" he added with a sigh. "There's rottenness everywhere."

Again he sighed, shot a veiled glance at Antoine, then, going up to Jacques, he burst out excitedly:

"That letter of Vladimir Kniabrovski's is a damn fine letter, let me tell you!"

"Tell me," Jacques inquired, "what exactly are his plans for the present?"

"He's looking after his health. He has gone back to his wife, to his mother, to his kids. Getting in trim for a new lease of life."

Vanheede was pacing up and down in front of the stove; now and then he locked his hands in a sudden access of excitement. As though talking to himself, he added with a rapt expression:

"One of the pure in heart, that's what old Kniabrovski is!"

"Yes, indeed—one of the pure in heart," Jacques echoed immediately, in the same tone of voice, adding after a pause: "When does he expect to bring out his book?"

"He doesn't say."

"Ruskinoff tells me it's a simply amazing work."

"How could it be otherwise? A book he wrote from beginning to end in a prison cell!" He took a few steps. "I haven't brought you his letter today. I've lent it to Olga to take to the club. I'll have it back this evening." Without looking at Jacques, like a dancing will-o'-the-wisp he flitted about the room, his eyes uplifted, beatifically smiling. "Vladimir tells me he has never been so completely himself as he was in that prison. Alone with his loneliness." The singing quality in his voice grew more pronounced, though he spoke in a lower tone. "He says that his cell was nice and light, right at the top of the building, and that he used to stand on the boards of his bed, so as to bring his forehead level with the edge of the barred window. He says he used to stand there for hours, thinking, watching the snow-flakes swirling above. He says he could see nothing else, not a roof, not a tree, never anything at all. But as soon as the spring came round and all through the summer, late in the afternoon a ray of sunlight would fall across his face. He says he used to wait for that moment all day long. You'll read his letter. He says he once heard a little child crying in the distance. Another time he heard the report of a gun." Vanheede glanced across at Antoine, who was listening to what he said and could not help following his movements interestedly with his eyes. "But I'll bring you the letter itself, tomorrow," he added, returning to his seat.

"Not tomorrow," Jacques said; "I shan't be here tomorrow."

Vanheede showed no surprise. But he looked round at Antoine again and rose to his feet after a short pause.

"Please excuse me. I'm afraid I've been intruding; I only wanted to let you know about Vladimir."

Jacques, too, had risen.

"You're working a bit too hard just now, Vanheede. You should take care of yourself."

"Oh, no."

"Still at Schomberg and Rieth's?"

"Why, yes." He smiled mischievously. "I do the typing. I say: 'Yes, sir,' from morn to night and pound the typewriter. What harm can that do? When the day's over, I am my own self again. Then, I'm free to think: 'No, sir,' all night long if I choose—till the next morning."

As he spoke, little Vanheede was holding his small head very high and his tousled flaxen forelock gave him the air of drawing himself up still further. He turned slightly, as though addressing Antoine for the first time.

"I starved and starved for ten years, gentlemen, for the sake of my ideals, and I'm not going to give them up."

Then he moved back to Jacques, held out his hand, and a note of distress came into the high-pitched, reedy voice.

"You are leaving us, perhaps? That's a shame! It always did me a lot of good, coming here, you know."

Deeply moved, Jacques made no answer, but placed his hand affectionately on the albino's arm. Antoine remembered the man with the scar. Him, too, Jacques had greeted in the same friendly, encouraging, and rather patronizing manner. He seemed really to hold a place of his own in these queer groups of people. They consulted him, sought his approval, and feared his censure; obviously, too, it did their hearts good to be in his company.

"He's a regular Thibault!" Antoine thought with satisfaction. But, immediately after, a feeling of sadness came over him. "Jacques will never remain in Paris," he mused; "he'll come and live in Switzerland again—that much is quite certain." In vain did he say to himself: "We'll write to each other, I'll come and see him, it won't be the same now as these last three years." That sense of disappointment rankled. "But what will he turn his hand to, what sort of life will he lead amongst these people? What use will he make of his talents? Ah, it will be very different from the wonderful career I'd mapped out for him in my dreams!"

Jacques had caught hold of his friend's arm and was steering him discreetly towards the door. There Vanheede turned round, took leave of Antoine with a shy nod, and disappeared onto the landing, followed by Jacques.

Once more, and for the last time, Antoine heard the small indignant voice.

"Everything's gone so rotten. They won't have anyone about them but fawning toadies."

# X

ON HIS return, Jacques volunteered no more information about this visitor than he had given about the hooded cyclist they had met in the street. He had poured out a glass of water and was sipping it slowly.

Antoine, to keep himself in countenance, lit a cigarette, and got up to throw the match into the stove; after a glance out of the window, he returned to his seat.

The silence lasted a few minutes. Jacques was again pacing up and down the room.

"Look here, Antoine!" he said abruptly, still walking to and fro. "Do try to understand me a bit! How could I possibly have given three whole years, three years of my life, to that Ecole Normale of theirs?"

Antoine was startled, but at once assumed an attentive, studiously indulgent air.

"It would only have been my school-life all over again," Jacques went on, "with a thin veneer of freedom. Lectures, and lessons, and everlasting essays! And 'proper feelings' of respect for all authority. And then the promiscuousness of it all! Every idea peddled round, and torn to tatters by that half-baked mob in the poky dens they call their 'digs.' Why, even the jargon they use—'freshies' and 'profs' and 'grinds'—it's all in keeping! No, I could never have put up with life under such conditions.

"Don't misunderstand me, Antoine. I don't mean … Of course I have a high opinion of them. The teacher's job is one that can only be carried on in an honourable way, as an act of faith. There's something attractive, I grant you, in their self-respect, the mental efforts they put forth, and the faithful service they give for so beggarly a reward. Yes, but …

"No, you can't really understand," he muttered after a pause. "It wasn't only to escape that barrack-like existence, nor from a distaste for all that machine-made education—that wasn't it. But, just think of the footling life, Antoine!" He broke off, then repeated the word "footling," with his eyes stubbornly fixed on the floor.

"When you went to see Jalicourt," Antoine asked, "I suppose you'd already made up your mind to …?"

"Certainly not!" Jacques remained standing where he was, with his brows raised, staring at the floor; he was making a genuine attempt to reconstruct the past. "Oh, that month of October! I'd come back from Maisons-Laffitte in a really dreadful state!" He hunched his shoulders as if a heavy load weighed on them, murmuring: "There were too many things that wouldn't fit together."

"Ah, yes, I remember that October." Antoine was thinking of Rachel.

"Then, on the last day before the beginning of the term, with that crowning misfortune, the threat of the Ecole looming just ahead, a sort of panic came over me. Just think how strange it all is! At the present moment I realize quite clearly that till my call on Jalicourt, I'd had only a deep-seated fear of what was coming, nothing more. Of course, I'd often felt heartily sick of the whole business and thought of giving up the Ecole, even of running away. But all that was no more than a vague dream. It was only after that evening with Jalicourt that it all took definite shape. You can hardly believe me, eh?" he said, looking up at last and noticing his brother's bewilderment. "Very well, you shall read the very words I jotted down in my diary that night, on reaching home; it so happens I came across them only the other day."

Again he fell to pacing gloomily up and down; the memory of that visit seemed still to upset him, even after so long an interval.

"When I think of it all …" he began, shaking his head. "But tell me, how did you get in touch with him? Did you write to each other? You went to see him, of course. How did he strike you?"

Antoine merely made an evasive gesture.

"Yes," Jacques said, supposing his brother's impression of the professor to have been unfavourable, "you can hardly realize what he meant to youngsters of my generation!" And, with a sudden change of mood, he came and sat down opposite Antoine, in an arm-chair beside the stove. "Oh, that Jalicourt!" he exclaimed with an unexpected smile. His voice had softened. He stretched out his legs luxuriously towards the fire. "For years, Antoine, we'd been saying to one another: 'When I am a pupil of Jalicourt.' By 'pupil' we really meant 'disciple.' And whenever some misgiving came over me, as regards the Ecole, I'd comfort myself by thinking: 'Yes, but there's always Jalicourt.' He was the only one whom we thought worth while, you see. We knew all his poems by heart. We retailed all we could pick up about him and his ways, we quoted his witticisms. His colleagues were jealous of him, so we were told. He'd not only succeeded in making the university put up with his lectures—long extempore effusions, full of bold views, digressions, sudden confidences, and broad jokes—but with eccentricities, his dandified get-up, his eyeglass, and even that jaunty soft hat of his. A curious character, whimsical, enthusiastic, a bit of a crank in his way—but what a mind, so well stocked and generous! What was so fine about him was his feeling for the modern world; he was the one man, for us, who had managed to lay his finger on its pulse. I had corresponded with him. I had five letters from him—my most valued treasures. Think of it, five letters, three of which, if not four, are, I still believe, simply masterpieces!

"Now listen to this. One spring morning at about eleven o'clock, we met him, I and a friend, in the street. How could one ever forget such a thing? He was walking up the Rue Soufflot, with long, springy steps. I can still see him with his coat-tails ballooning behind him, his grey spats, the white hair peeping out under the wide brim of his hat. Very upright, his monocle screwed into position, his Roman nose jutting out like a tall ship's prow, and the drooping white moustache that brought to mind a Gallic chieftain's. The profile of an old eagle, ready to strike. A bird of prey, with the spindle-shanks of a heron. And something of an old-school English nobleman, as well. Unforgettable, he was!"

"Yes, I can see him!" Antoine exclaimed.

"We shadowed him up to his door. We were spellbound. We visited a dozen shops, trying to get a photo of him!" Jacques jerked back his legs under him with sudden violence. "And now that I think of it, I loathe him!"

"I'm pretty sure he's never had the faintest idea of that!" Antoine grinned.

But Jacques was not listening. Facing the fire, a pensive smile on his lips, he went on speaking in a faraway voice.

"Shall I tell you all about it? Well, it was after dinner, one night, I suddenly made up my mind to go and call on him. To explain, well, everything to him. So off I went, on the spur of the moment, without giving the matter a second thought. By nine o'clock I was ringing his bell, in the Place du Pantheon. You know the house, don't you? A dark entrance-hall, a stupid-looking Breton maid, the dining-room, the rustle of a vanishing skirt. The table had been cleared, but there was a work-basket left behind, with clothes to be darned in it. A smell of food, of pipe smoke, a stuffy heat. The door opened. There was Jalicourt. Not a thing to remind one of the old eagle of the Rue Soufflot, or of the writer of those marvellous letters. Nothing of the poet, or the lofty thinker! Or any Jalicourt we knew. Nothing whatever. A round-shouldered Jalicourt, minus the eyeglass, an old pea-jacket mottled with dandruff, a dead pipe, a peevish mouth. He must have been quietly snoring, digesting his boiled cabbage, with his big nose nodding over a stove. I certainly shouldn't have been admitted, if the maid had known her job. Well, he'd been caught napping, taken off his guard, and had to see it through. He showed me into his study.

"I was too excited to think. I just blurted out what I had come to say. 'I've come to ask you, sir,' and so forth. He pulled himself together, came to life, more or less, and I got a glimpse of the old eagle again. lie put up his eyeglass and motioned me to a seat. There was a touch of the old peer in his manner. 'So you want my advice?' he asked ir a surprised tone. As if he meant: 'Have you no one else to apply to?' True enough. I'd never thought of that. You see, Antoine, it's not your fault, but it was very seldom I could bring myself to follow your advice—or anyone else's, for that matter. I preferred to steer my own course; I'm built that way. My answer to Jalicourt was to that effect. His attentiveness led me on. I told him straight out: 'I want to be a novelist, a great novelist!' I had to tell him; no use beating about the bush. He never turned a hair. I went on pouring my heart out, I explained to him, well, everything, in fact. That I was conscious of a store of energy within me, of a deep-seated, vital impulse that was my very own, personal, unique! That for years past every step forward that I made in 'culture' had always been made at the expense of what was best in me, that vital force. That I had developed an intense dislike for study, for schools, and learning, for pedantry and idle chatter, and that this aversion had all the violence of an instinct of self-defence, of self-preservation! Yes, I'd taken the bit between my teeth! I said to him: 'All that is weighing on me, sir; it's stifling me, and it's warping all my natural impulses!' "

As he spoke Jacques's expression was constantly changing; at one moment his eyes were obdurate, smouldering with passion, then suddenly the hardness would go out of them; they grew tender, wistful, almost appealing.

"Antoine!" he cried. "It's true, every word of it, you know."

"I quite realize that, old man."

"But don't imagine that there's pride behind it," Jacques went on. "I've no wish to be above the rest, not a trace of what most people call ambition. You've only got to look at the way I'm living. And yet, Antoine, believe me, I've been perfectly happy here!"

After a few seconds, Antoine spoke again.

"Well, what happened next? What was his answer?"

"Wait a bit. He made no answer, so far as I can remember. Ah, yes, in the end, I came out with some lines from a poem I'd begun. It was called 'The Spring.' A sort of prose-poem, it was. Awful nonsense, really!" he added, with a blush. "I'd written that I aspired 'to bend above myself as one bends over a flowing spring,' and so forth. 'To draw aside the tall grass and peer unhindered into the crystal depths.' There he stopped me. 'A pretty conceit.' That's all he had to say! The crabbed old pedant! I tried to catch his eye. But he would not look at me; he kept on fiddling with his signet-ring."

"I can quite picture him!" Antoine said.

"Then he embarked on a regular lecture. 'It doesn't do to be too scornful of the beaten track. The advantages, indeed the mental agility, one derives from being subjected to discipline,' and so forth. Oh, he was just like the rest of them. He hadn't understood a thing, not a thing! All he could do was to offer a few well-worn platitudes. I was furious with myself for coming, for having laid bare my heart to him! He kept on for some time in the same strain. The one thing he seemed concerned with was to pigeonhole me neatly. He'd say, for instance: 'You are the type of person who … Young fellows of your age … You might be classed among those characters whom …' Finally, I lost my temper. 'I loathe classifications and I hate the people who make them. Under the pretext of classifying you, they maim you, whittle you down. By the time you're out of their clutches you're no more than a mutilated fragment of yourself—a cripple.' He kept on smiling; he seemed quite ready to take any amount of punishment! Then I began to shout at him. 'Yes, sir, I hate professors! That's the reason I came to see you, and none of the others.' He was still smiling, as though I'd flattered him. To make himself agreeable, he asked me a few questions. Maddening questions! He wanted to know what I had done. 'Nothing!' What I intended to do. 'Everything!' The old humbug hadn't even the pluck to laugh me down. He was much too frightened of being sized up by one of the rising generation. For that was his obsession: what the coming generation thought of him. From the time I'd crossed his threshold, the only thought at the back of his mind was for the book he was writing, *My Experiences*. (It must have been published, by now, but I shall never read it.) He was in a blue funk at the idea his book wouldn't be up to the mark, and, whenever a youngster like myself crossed his path, he would hark back to that anxiety of his: 'I wonder what this young fellow will think of my work?' "

"Poor devil!" Antoine exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I don't deny it; he was really to be pitied. Still, I hadn't come there just to have a view of his anxieties. I was still hankering after the Jalicourt of my dreams. Under any of his avatars: the poet, the philosopher, and so on—any of them except the one he was showing me just then. Finally I got up to leave. It was a grotesque performance. He followed me out, keeping up his patter. 'So difficult to advise the younger generation … No hard-and-fast rules of life … Every man must blaze his own trail,' and so forth. I walked in front, without saying a word; my nerves were on edge, as you may well imagine! The drawing-room, then the dining-room, then the hall. I opened the door myself, in the dark, stumbling over his rubbishy antiques; I hardly left him time to find the electric switches."

Antoine could not help smiling; well did he recall the arrangement of the flat—the "period" furniture, the upholstered chairs, the bric-a-brac. But Jacques had not finished yet; a look of something like alarm came over his face.

"Then—wait a bit!—I can't quite remember how it happened. Perhaps it dawned on him why I was bolting like that. I heard his raucous voice behind me in the hall. 'What more do you want me to say? Can't you see I'm played out, done for?' I turned round, couldn't believe my ears. What a pitiful figure he cut just then! He kept on repeating: 'Played out … done for! And my whole life wasted!' I began to protest. Yes, I meant it; I'd stopped being annoyed with him. But he wouldn't give in. 'I've done nothing,' he said.

'Nothing at all. And I'm the only one who knows that.' And as I went on protesting, rather clumsily, he flew into a sort of rage. 'What on earth is it that fools you all? My books? Zero for them! I've put nothing into them, not a scrap of what I might have. Well, then, what's left? My degrees? My lectures? The Academy? What's left, I ask you? This thing?' He caught hold of the lapel of his coat, with the Legion of Honour rosette on it, and was shaking it pettishly. 'This thing, I ask you? This "riband to stick in my coat"?' "

Carried away by his reminiscences, Jacques had risen from his seat, and was acting out the scene with ever-increasing vehemence. And Antoine was put in mind of the Jalicourt he had had a glimpse of, in the same setting, holding himself erect, preening himself, in his brightly lit room.

"All of a sudden he calmed down," Jacques went on. "I fancy he was afraid of being overheard. He opened a door and showed me into a sort of pantry that smelled of oranges and beeswax. His lips were drawn back in a derisive grin, but his expression was hard and bitter, and his eye bloodshot behind the monocle. He was leaning against a shelf on which were some glasses and a fruit-dish. It was a marvel how he managed not to knock anything over. All that happened three years ago, but the tone of his voice and his words are still ringing in my ears.

"He began talking, endlessly, in a low, monotonous voice. 'Listen! I'm going to tell you the whole truth, nothing but the truth. At your age, I too … I was a trifle older, perhaps; I'd just graduated from the Ecole. And I too felt myself called to be a novelist. I too had that vital energy which needs freedom if it is to realize its full potentialities. And I too felt intuitively that I was taking the wrong road. Just for a moment. And I too had the notion of asking an older man's advice. Only I applied to a novelist. Guess who it was! No, you'd never understand, you can't conceive what that man stood for in the minds of the younger generation, in 1880. I called on him at his house, he let me ramble on, watching me with his gimlet eyes, and fumbling with his beard. He was in a hurry—he always was in a hurry'—and he got up without hearing me out. Oh, there was no hesitation, in his case! He said to me, with that peculiar lisp he had that turned the *s*'s into *f*'s: "There'f only one royal road for the would-be novelift, and that'f journalifm!" Yes that's what he told me. Well, I left, no wiser than I'd come, my young friend—like the fool I was! I went back to my manuals, to my tutors, to my fellow-students, to the examination-rooms, the "advanced" reviews, the debating-societies, and all the rest of it. With a fine future before me. A fine future, indeed!' Bang! Jalicourt's hand crashed on my shoulder. Never shall I forget his eye, that Cyclops eye blazing behind the monocle. He had drawn himself up to his full height, he spluttered in my face. 'What's it you want of me, my boy? A piece of advice? Well, here it is, but beware of it! Drop your books, and follow your instincts! Here's a home-truth for you, my friend; if there's a spark of genius in your make-up, your only way of making something of yourself is from within, under the stress of your natural impulses. Perhaps, in your case, it's still not too late. Waste no time about it. Go out and live. Anywhere, anyhow! You're a boy of twenty, you have eyes and legs, haven't you? Trust Jalicourt. Join the staff of a newspaper. Keep on the lookout for "stories." Do you hear me? I know what I'm talking about. "Stories." The plunge into the pauper's grave! Nothing else will rub the cobwebs off you. Go at it, with all you've got, morning, noon, and night; mind you don't miss a single accident, a single suicide, or scandal in high life, or murder in a brothel! Keep your eyes wide open; notice everything that the tide of civilization sweeps along with it—the good, the bad, the unsuspected, the unimagined! And after that, perhaps, you may venture to say something about men, about society, about yourself!'

"Believe me, Antoine, at that moment I wasn't just looking at him, I was devouring him with my eyes, thrilled through and through. Only, a moment later, all was over. Without saying a word, he opened the door and good as pushed me out, across the entrance-hall, onto the landing. I've never been able to make out why he did it. Had he checked himself deliberately? Was he sorry he had let himself go like that? Was he afraid I might tell people about it? I can still see that lanky jaw of his quivering with emotion. He kept on mumbling in a low voice: 'Go away! Go away! Go back to your libraries, sir!'

"The door was slammed in my face. A fat lot I cared! Ah, you should have seen me racing down the four flights of stairs and out into the street, kicking up my heels in the darkness, like a colt just turned out to grass!"

Emotion had taken away his breath; he poured out another glass of water and drank it at a gulp. As he set down the glass with an unsteady hand, it jarred against the water-jug. In the long silence, the thin, crystalline sound seemed to linger on interminably.

Hardly less overwrought than his brother, Antoine was trying to piece together the events that had led up to Jacques's flight. There were many gaps still to be filled in. He would have liked to elicit a few confidences as regards Giuseppe's emotional dilemma. But that was a delicate subject. "Too many irreconcilable things," Jacques had said just now, with a sigh. That was all he had to go on; but Jacques's stubborn reticence showed how large a part those sentimental entanglements had played in his decision to run away. Antoine wondered how far, at the present time, his heart was still preoccupied with them.

He endeavoured roughly to muster the facts. In October, then, Jacques had come back from Maisons. At that moment, of what nature were his relations with Gise, his meetings with Jenny? Had he tried to break off? Or entered into commitments impossible to fulfill? Antoine pictured his brother in Paris, lacking a clearly defined course of study, alone and far too free, turning the unsolvable problem over and over in his mind. He must have been living in a precarious state of mingled rapture and depression; with nothing to look forward to but the beginning of the term and the cloistered routine of the Ecole Normale, the mere thought of which must have sickened him. Then, suddenly, his visit to Jalicourt had shown him a way out of it all, a bright rift in the drab horizon of his future. How he must have exulted in that prospect of escape from an impossible situation and of a new, adventurous existence, living his own life! Yes, Antoine mused, that accounts for the fact not only that Jacques left us, but that for three whole years he persisted in that silence of the tomb. He was embarking on a new life and, to achieve this, to blot out the past entirely, he needed to be forgotten, dead to his family and friends.

But he could not help remembering how Jacques had taken advantage of his trip to Le Havre, had not waited even one day to see him and talk things over. His resentment was stirring again, but he fought it down, subdued his grievances, and made an effort to renew the conversation, to lead his brother to the sequel.

"So that was it," he remarked. "And it was the next day that you …?" He paused.

Jacques had sat down again by the stove, resting his elbows on his knees, his shoulders hunched and his head bent low; he was whistling.

Now he looked up.

"Yes, the next day." Then, in a reluctant tone he added: "Immediately after the scene with …"

The scene with their father, of course, the scene at the Palazzo Seregno! Antoine had forgotten that.

"Father never breathed a word of it to me," he added quickly.

Jacques looked surprised. Nevertheless, he averted his gaze, making a vague gesture as if to imply: "Oh, let it go! I haven't the heart to speak of that again."

Antoine was thinking: "Of course that accounts for his not waiting till I came back from Le Havre," and felt a certain consolation in the thought.

Jacques had resumed his meditative attitude, and started whistling to himself again. His eyebrows twitched nervously. Despite his efforts to blot it out, that tragic scene had flashed across his memory once more. Father and son had been left alone together in the dining-room, just after lunch; M. Thibault had asked some question about the beginning of the term at the Ecole Normale, and Jacques had bluntly told his father he had decided not to enter. An altercation had followed, of ever-increasing violence. M. Thibault had pounded on the table with his fist. At last Jacques had thrown discretion to the winds and in an unaccountable fit of madness had blurted out Jenny's name—as a direct challenge to his father. By now he had lost his head completely, answering threats with counter-threats and launching out into a series of irrevocable declarations. And then had come that tragic climax when, now he had burned his boats and rendered all compromise impossible, he had uttered that last cry of rebellion and despair, had rushed out of the room, shouting: "I'll go and kill myself!"

The picture evoked was so clear-cut, so poignant, that he jumped up as if he had been stung. Antoine had just time to catch a glint of madness in his brother's eyes; but Jacques quickly pulled himself together.

"It's past four," he said; "I must be off, if I'm to attend to that business of mine." He was already putting on his overcoat; he seemed impatient to get away. "You'll stay here, won't you? I shall be back before five. My bag won't take long to pack. We can dine at the station restaurant; that will be simplest." He had laid on the table some files stuffed with papers of various shapes and sizes. "Here," he said, "dip into these, if you feel inclined to. They're magazine articles, short stories. The least worthless of the things I've written these last few years."

He was already outside the door when, turning round awkwardly, he threw out in a detached manner: "By the way, you haven't told me anything about—about Daniel?"

Antoine had the impression his brother had been going to say: "about the Fontanins."

"Daniel? Why, just think, we've become great friends! After you went away, I found him so loyal, so devoted, so affectionate!"

To cover up his confusion, Jacques feigned extreme astonishment; Antoine made as if he were taken in by it.

"That's a surprise now, isn't it!" he laughed. "Of course he and I are pretty different, but I've come to accept his attitude to life; it may very well be justifiable in so gifted an artist. You know, his success exceeds all our expectations! His private show at Ludwigson's in 1911 brought him right into the limelight. He could sell any number of pictures if he chose; only he paints so few. We are very unlike each other—or, rather, we *were* unlike," he amended, pleased to grasp an opportunity for putting in a few words about himself, and showing Jacques that the portrait of Umberto's character no longer fitted him. "I've become much less rigid in my way of looking at things, you see. I'm inclined to think that one needn't …"

"Is he in Paris?" Jacques cut in rudely. "Does he know that …?"

Antoine had some difficulty in keeping his temper.

"Why, no; he's doing his military service, as a sergeant, at Lunéville. He's there for another ten months or so, till October '14. I've hardly come across him at all for a whole year."

He stopped speaking, chilled by the gloomy, faraway look in his brother's eyes.

Once Jacques felt sure that his voice would no longer betray his agitation, he said:

"Don't let the fire go out in the stove, Antoine." And with these words he was gone.

# XI

LEFT to his own devices, Antoine went over to the table and untied the files lying there. His interest was aroused.

All sorts of documents were contained in them. First, a selection of articles on topical events, cut out from newspapers and signed "Jacques the Fatalist." Then a number of poems, rhapsodies on mountain scenery, which had appeared in a Belgian magazine over the pseudonym "J. Mühlenberg." Lastly a series of short stories with a general title, *Leaves from the Black Book*; they were in the nature of sketches more than stories, by-products, it seemed, of Jacques's experiences as a reporter, and signed "Jack Baulthy." Antoine read some of these: "The Octogenarians," "The Child Who Killed Himself," "A Blind Man's Jealousy," "A Fit of Rage." The characters were drawn from everyday life and, though etched only in outline, all seemed to stand out in bold relief. Jacques used the graphic, choppy style of "*La Sorellina*," but divested these sketches of all poetic verbiage— which imparted to them a faithfulness to life that gripped the reader's interest.

Yet, despite the interest of these literary efforts, Antoine's attention wandered. There had been too many unexpected happenings that morning. And, above all, now that he was left to himself, his thoughts kept drifting back to the sick-bed he had left the day before; what terrible events might be in progress there at this very moment! Had he done wrong to leave? No, certainly not, since he was bringing Jacques home.

A gentle, though determined, tap at the door roused him from his musings.

"Come in," he said.

He was surprised to see a woman's form outlined against the dark background of the staircase. He seemed to recognize the girl he had caught sight of at breakfast-time, that morning. She was carrying some logs of firewood in a basket, of which he hastened to relieve her.

"My brother's just gone out," he said.

She nodded, as though to say: "I know that"; perhaps indeed: "That's why I've come upstairs." She was taking stock of Antoine with undisguised curiosity, but there was nothing in the least pert in her attitude; on the contrary, it seemed that she had carefully thought out the bold step she was taking now, and had compelling reasons for it. Antoine gathered the impression that she had been crying a very short time before. Presently her eyelashes began to quiver; then brusquely, in a bitterly reproachful voice, she asked him:

"Are you going to take him away?"

"Yes. My father is very ill."

She seemed not to have heard.

"Why?" She stamped her foot angrily. "I don't want you to!"

"I tell you, my father is on the verge of death," Antoine replied.

But explanations were obviously lost on her. Slowly her eyes filled with tears. She swung round towards the window, folded her hands and wrung them. Then she let her arms fall limply.

"He'll never come back!" she murmured in a broken voice.

She was tall, broad-shouldered, and rather plump; febrile in her movements, and listless when in repose. Two sleek, heavy braids of flaxen hair encircled her low brow, and were twisted into a knot at the back of her head. Under this diadem, her regular, if somewhat coarse, features had an almost queenly air, which was enhanced by the classical mould of her full, sinuous, yet determined lips, that ended unexpectedly on either side in two attractive dimples.

She turned round to face Antoine.

"Promise me," she said, "swear to me by Jesus Christ that you will not prevent him from coming back."

"Of course I won't! Why should I?" he said, with a conciliatory smile.

She did not smile in return, but stared fixedly at the young man across a mist of shining tears. Under the close-fitting fabric, her bosom heaved convulsively. She gave herself quite shamelessly to Antoine's interested scrutiny. From between her breasts she took out a tiny handkerchief, screwed up into a ball, and applied it to her eyes and then, with a sniff, to her nostrils. The slumberous pupils, slotted between the half-closed lids, had a velvety, voluptuous appeal. They brought to mind deep, stagnant pools; now and again there would well up in them an eddy of inscrutable thoughts. At such moments, she would bend down or turn away her head.

"Did he speak to you of me? Of Sophia?"

"No."

A steely-blue flash shot from between her eyelids.

"You won't let him know I told you all this, will you?"

Antoine smiled again. "But you haven't told me anything!"

"Oh, yes, I have," she retorted, throwing back her head and half closing her lids again.

She looked round for a chair, then drew it up near Antoine's and sat down in feverish haste, as though she had not a minute to lose.

"Listen," she remarked, "you've something to do with the stage, haven't you?" He shook his head. "Yes, you have. I've a picture postcard of someone just like you. He's a stage-star in Paris." She was smiling now. A sentimental, almost sensual smile.

"So you're very keen on the theatre?" he asked; it was too much bother trying to undeceive her.

"On the movies—yes! And real dramas. I adore them!"

Now and then a brief, unlooked-for change came over the girl's features, ruffling their composure. At such moments her mouth, which she opened wide for the least remark, opened still wider, disclosing her broad white teeth and coral-pink gums.

He maintained a reserved attitude.

"I suppose you have quite good companies here, haven't you?"

She drew closer still. “Have you ever been at Lausanne before?” Her whole attitude, as she bent towards him, even her way of speaking in low, fluttering undertones, seemed to suggest that she was expecting and prepared to reciprocate advances.

“Never,” he replied.

“Do you think you’ll come back?”

“Quite likely.”

Her eyes hardened for a second, as her gaze sank into his. Then, shaking her head emphatically, “No, you won’t,” she said.

She opened the door of the stove to put fresh fuel in.

“Oh, come now!” Antoine protested. “It’s too hot in here already.”

“That’s so.” She put the back of her hand to her cheek. None the less she picked up a log and dropped it onto the glowing embers, then a second one and a third. “Jack likes it better that way,” she said defiantly.

She remained on her knees, her back towards him, her eyes bent upon the blazing fire, which was toasting her cheeks. Night was falling. Antoine’s gaze wandered over the rippling curve of her shoulders, the nape of her neck, her thick, plaited hair haloed by the glow. What was she waiting for? Obviously she was conscious that his eyes were fixed on her. He seemed to glimpse a smile hovering on what little he could see of her averted features. But then, with a supple twist of her body, she rose to her feet. After shutting the stove-door with her foot, she took a few steps across the room, caught sight of a sugar-bowl on a side-table, dipped her fingers greedily into it, and began crunching a lump of sugar. Fishing out another, she held it towards him, from a distance.

“No, thanks,” he laughed.

“Bad luck if you don’t!” she exclaimed, tossing the lump of sugar towards him; he deftly caught it.

They observed each other shrewdly. Sophia’s eyes seemed to be asking: “Who are you?” even: “What’s it to be, between you and me?” Her indolent, insatiate eyes, flecked with motes of gold by the long translucent lashes, had the pale lustre of a sandy beach just before a summer storm breaks. Yet they were heavy with listlessness rather than with desire. “One of those minxes,” Antoine was thinking, “who yield at the first touch. And bite you as they kiss you! And hate you’ ever after. And give you no peace till they’ve played some dirty trick on you—by way of vengeance.”

As if she had guessed his thoughts, she moved away and began staring out of the window at the grey downpour that was hastening the close of day.

The silence was so prolonged that Antoine began to feel uncomfortable.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked.

“Oh! I don’t often think,” she confessed, without moving from the window.

“But when you do think, what is it about?”

“Nothing!”

Hearing him laugh, she left the window and gave him an engaging smile. Her movements now did not seem in the least hurried. She walked vaguely towards the door, her arms dangling. When she came beside it, her hand happened to brush against the key.

Antoine had an impression that she was turning it in the lock; the blood rose to his cheeks.

“Goodbye,” she whispered without looking up.

She had opened the door.

Surprised and obscurely disappointed, Antoine leaned forward, hoping to catch her eye. Like an echo, half playfully, in a soft, almost appealing tone, he murmured:

“Goodbye.”

But the door closed. She had vanished, without turning back.

He heard the rustle of her skirt against the banisters, and the song she was forcing herself to sing as she went downstairs.

# XII

LITTLE by little darkness was filling the room, but Antoine, lost in a maze of thoughts, could not find the energy to get up and turn on the lamps. More than an hour and a half had passed since Jacques had gone out. And, try as he might to repress it, a reluctant suspicion kept hovering at the back of Antoine's mind. As the minutes passed he felt his anxiety steadily increasing; then all at once it vanished— he had recognized his brother's footstep outside the door.

Jacques entered without a word, and did not even seem to notice that the room was in darkness. He sank wearily into a chair beside the door, his face just visible in the faint glow from the stove. His hat was down over his eyes, his overcoat still across his arm.

He gave a sudden little sigh.

"Oh, Antoine, don't take me away. Go to Paris by yourself and leave me here. You know, I very nearly didn't come back just now!" Then, before Antoine had time to put in a word, he cried out: "No, don't speak, don't say anything! I *know.* I'll come with you."

Rising, he turned on the light.

Antoine carefully refrained from looking in his direction; to tide over the awkward moment he pretended to go on reading the clippings on the table.

Jacques began moving lethargically about the room. After tossing various articles onto the bed, he opened a suitcase and began packing his clothes and other personal effects in it. Now and then he whistled under his breath—always the same tune. Looking up, Antoine saw him drop a bundle of letters into the stove, and stow away in a closet all the loose papers lying about the room. Then he locked the closet, putting the key in his pocket. Presently he sat down in a corner, his head sunk between his shoulders, his back bent, and began scribbling postcards on his knee, nervously pushing back his long hair from his forehead as he wrote.

Antoine's heart softened. Had Jacques said to him just then: "Please go away without me," he would have embraced his brother and gone back alone, without another word.

It was Jacques who broke the silence. After changing his shoes and closing the suitcase, he went up to his brother.

"It's seven o'clock, you know. We'd better be off."

Without replying, Antoine stood up at once. After putting on his overcoat, he turned to Jacques.

"Can I give you a hand?"

"Thanks. Don't bother."

They spoke in lower tones than they had used during the day.

"Let me take your suitcase."

"It's not heavy; thanks. You go in front!"

They crossed the room almost without a sound. Antoine went out first. He heard Jacques switching off the light behind him and closing the door gently.

They snatched a hasty meal at the station restaurant. Jacques did not speak a word, and ate hardly anything. Antoine, whose mind was as heavy as his brother's, respected his desire for silence and made no pretence of cheerfulness.

The train was in; they walked up and down the platform till it was time to start. From the underground passage a never-ending stream of passengers came pouring up.

"Looks as if the train will be crowded," Antoine remarked.

Jacques made no reply. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, he volunteered a confidence.

"You know, I've been here for two and a half years."

"At Lausanne?"

"Not only at Lausanne. In Switzerland, I meant." After a few steps along the platform he murmured: "Ah, what a wonderful time that was for me, the spring of 1911!"

Once more they walked the full length of the train without speaking. Jacques's thoughts were evidently following the same trend as before, for suddenly he launched into an explanation.

"I'd been having such dreadful headaches in Germany that I put by every penny I could so as to be able to escape, to go to Switzerland and live an open-air life. I got here at the end of May, when the spring was at its height. I lived in the mountains, at Mühlenberg in the Canton of Lucerne."

"Ah, Mühlenberg—that explains."

"Yes. That's where I wrote nearly all the poems which I signed 'Mühlenberg.' I was working very hard at that period."

"Did you stay there long?"

"Six months. In a farmhouse. Only the two old people, the farmer and his wife; no children. I'll never forget that spring, or that summer. The day I arrived, and for the first time looked out of my window—the beauty of it all! A spacious, rolling countryside, all in simple outlines—nature at her noblest! I was out of doors from dawn to dusk. The meadows were full of flowers and wild bees, and the huge pastures billowed up to the skyline, with cows grazing every-, where, and little wooden bridges over the mountain streams. I'd walk for miles and miles, working as I walked. I'd tramp all day, and sometimes I went out at night as well. Ah, those nights at Mühlenberg!" His arm rose slowly, described a wide circle, slowly sank again.

"What about your headaches?"

"Oh, I began to feel ever so much better almost from the day I got there. Yes, Mühlenberg cured me outright. In fact, I've never felt in better form, or my mind so untroubled." His face lit up at the memory of it. "Untroubled, without a worry in the world—and all the time full of thoughts and projects, the maddest fancies! I almost think the seeds of everything I'll write in my lifetime were sown during that wonderful summer, in that bright air. I can remember days when I was so carried away—oh, I knew then what it

means to be drunk with happiness. Why—I hardly dare to talk about it—there were times when I started jumping in the air and scampering up hill and down dale as if I'd gone off my head! Then I'd fling myself on my face into the grass, and start sobbing, crying my heart out for the ecstasy of it all. Can you believe that? Well, it's true; yes, so true that I remember some days when I had been crying like that and had to come back by a roundabout path, so as to bathe my eyes at a little spring I'd discovered on the mountainside." He lowered his eyes, walked some steps in silence, then, without looking up, repeated: "Yes, but all that was two and a half years ago—ancient history!"

He did not speak again before they left.

The train drew out without a whistle, with the obdurate insistence and docile force of machines that function like clockwork. Dry-eyed, Jacques watched the empty platform recede and, as the speed accelerated, the myriad lights of the suburbs dance past the pane. Then all was darkness, and now he pictured himself being pitched headlong and defenceless into the black night.

Cooped up amongst all these strangers, he looked round for Antoine, and saw him standing a few yards away, in the corridor. His back was half turned and he, too, seemed to be lost in thought, staring out into the darkness. Jacques felt a sudden wish for closer contact with him and, once again, an irresistible yearning to unburden his heart.

He edged his way to his brother's side and tapped him briskly on the shoulder.

Wedged between other passengers standing in the corridor and a pile of luggage, Antoine supposed that Jacques had merely a word to say to him and, without shifting his position, turned his head and leaned a little to one side. In the crowded corridor where they were penned like cattle, across the roar and rattle of the train, Jacques brought his mouth near Antoine's ear and began speaking in a hurried whisper.

"Look here, Antoine, you've got to know… . To start with, I led

He had intended to say: "I led an unspeakable life. I sank lower and lower. I was an interpreter, a guide, lived by my wits. I got in with Achmet—worse, with the whole underworld, the Rue aux Juifs. My friends were down-and-outers: old Kriiger, Celadonio, Carolina, and their bunch. One night, on the quays, they clubbed me on the head; that was when my headaches started. Then I was in Naples. In Germany I lived with Rupprecht and 'little Rosa'—what a pair they were, those two!—and at Munich, because of Wilfried, I was held by the police." But the more fluently such avowals rose to his lips, and the more copiously the turbid flood of memories came pouring from the depths, the more he realized that the "unspeakable" life he had led was quite literally unspeakable; no words could cope with it.

Losing heart, he merely said to his brother in a low voice: "Antoine, I led an unspeakable life. Yes, unspeakable." He tried to put into the flat, ungainly epithet all the indignities, the foulness of the world. "Unspeakable!" he said again, with an accent of despair, and gradually the repetition of the word acted as an anodyne, as efficacious as a full confession.

Antoine had turned round and was facing him, decidedly ill at east and worried by the nearness of so many strangers. Still, despite his fear that Jacques might raise his voice, and apprehensive of what he might be going to say, Antoine did his best to put a good face on it.

But Jacques, who was leaning against a panel of the corridor, did not seem inclined to embark on further explanations.

Presently the passengers began to file out of the corridor to their seats in the crowded car, and soon Antoine and Jacques were sufficiently isolated to be able to talk without being overheard.

Jacques, who till now had been in a silent mood, seemingly reluctant to go on with the conversation, suddenly turned to his brother again.

"You know, Antoine, the really appalling thing is not feeling sure of what is … normal. No, not 'normal'—that's a stupid word. How shall I put it? Not knowing if one's feelings, or, rather, instincts are … But you're a doctor, of course; you must know." His brows were knitted and his eyes fixed on the darkness. He spoke in a low tone, hesitating over his words. "Listen! There are things that work up one's feelings; one gets a sort of sudden impulse towards this or that, an impulse that rushes up from what lies deepest in one. Isn't that true? Well, it's impossible to know if other people have similar feelings, similar impulses; or if one's just a—a freak of nature. Do you see what I mean? You, Antoine, you've had to deal with so many people, so many cases, that I suppose you know what is—how shall I put it?—ordinary, and what is exceptional. But for the rest of us, who don't know—well, you can guess how agonizing it can be. Let me give you an example. There are all sorts of inexplicable desires that crop up all of a sudden when a boy's thirteen or fourteen— vague, incoherent thoughts that get hold of his mind, and he can't shake them off. But he feels ashamed of them; they seem like festering sores and he tries to hide them from the world at all costs. Then one day he discovers that nothing's more natural; why, they have even a beauty of their own! And that everyone, without exception, has the same desires. Do you see what I mean? Well, there are other dark impulses, things of the same sort, instincts that well up in one, and about which—even when one's grown up, Antoine, even at my age—one wonders, one can't be sure… ."

Suddenly his face grew tense, exasperated; a disturbing thought had flashed across his mind. He had just realized how quickly, how easily, the old allegiance to his brother had come back, linking him up, through Antoine, with his past and all its implications. Only yesterday that chasm had seemed unbridgeable. And now—a few hours together had been enough to …! He clenched his fists, lowered his eyes, fell silent.

A few minutes later, without once having raised his head or opened his lips again, he went back to his seat.

When, surprised by Jacques's abrupt departure, Antoine decided to follow, he found his brother settled down for the night, it seemed, in the dimly lit compartment; his eyelids shut upon his tears, Jacques was feigning sleep.

# PART VI
# THE DEATH OF A FATHER
# I

WHEN, at eight in the evening, just before taking the train to Lausanne, Antoine had looked in on Mile, de Waize, to tell her he would be away for twenty-four hours, his remarks had failed to take immediate effect on the old lady. For nearly an hour she had been seated at her desk struggling to concoct a letter to the railway company, complaining that a basket of vegetables had gone astray between Maisons-Laffitte and Paris; and exasperation had prevented her from thinking of anything else. It was only later on, when she had disposed of the letter more or less to her liking, had undressed for bed. and was saying her prayers, that one of Antoine's remarks flashed back into her mind: "Please tell Sister Céline that Dr. Thérivier has been warned and will come, if needed, at a moment's notice." At once, all eagerness to shift her responsibility then and there, without troubling about the hour, without even finishing the prayer, she hurried across the flat to transmit the message to the nurse.

It was nearly ten o'clock. The lights were off, and M. Thibault's room was in darkness but for the fitful glow from the log-fire, kept constantly burning to purify the air. Every day the need for ventilation made itself more acutely felt, and this expedient was proving inadequate to carry off the pungent vapour from the poultices, the smell of the menthol in the liniments, and, worst of all, the odours emanating from the old man's person.

For the moment the pain had abated; the old man lay in an uneasy doze, snoring and groaning in the darkness. For many months he had not enjoyed the deep oblivion of real sleep. Going to sleep, for him, had ceased to mean the loss of consciousness; it meant only that for a brief spell he lost track of the slow lapse of time, minute by minute, and let his limbs sink into a partial torpor. But never for an instant did his brain stop working, calling up a stream of pictures, like an incoherent film in which fragments of his past life were flashed upon the screen; and though this pageant of the past might hold his interest, it was as exhausting as a nightmare.

That night M. Thibault's torpor was not profound enough to free him from a haunting dread, which, mingling with his hallucinations and growing stronger every moment, set him running before an invisible pursuer, across the buildings of his old school, along the dormitory, down the corridors, through the chapel, and out into the playground. There, outside the gymnasium door, in front of the statue of Saint Joseph, he crumpled up, his head buried in his arms. And then, suddenly, from a coign of darkness, that terrifying, nameless Thing, which had been on his track night after night, leapt forth upon him. Just as it was about to crush his life out, he awoke with a start.

Behind the screen, an unwonted candle was lighting up a corner usually left in darkness; two shadows wavered on the wall, cornice-high. He heard whispering: Mademoiselle's voice. Once before she had come like that, by night, to call him; Jacques was having convulsions. One of the children ill? What time was it?

Then Sister Céline's voice recalled him to the present. He could not quite catch what they were saying; holding his breath, he listened hard.

A few words came clear: "Antoine told me the doctor had been warned … will come at once …"

Someone ill? Of course—*he* was ill. But—why the doctor?

Again that nameless form of fear was prowling in the shadows. Was he worse? What had happened? Had he slept? He had not noticed any change for the worse in his condition. Still, the doctor had been called in. In the middle of the night. He was dying. No hope left.

Then all he had said—without believing it—announcing that his last hour was near, came back to his mind. A cold sweat broke out on his body.

He tried to shout: "Help! Antoine!" But all that passed his lips was a wordless cry—so agonizing, however, that Sister Céline, thrusting aside the screen, rushed to the bed and turned on the light.

Her first notion was that he was having some sort of fit. The old man's face, usually a sickly yellow, had turned scarlet; his eyes were wide open, his lips working inarticulately.

M. Thibault, meanwhile, paid no attention to what was happening round him. Centred on its fixed idea, his brain was functioning with ruthless clarity. In a few seconds he had reviewed the whole course of his illness: the operation, the months of respite, the relapse, and then the gradual decline of his strength, the way his pain was growing more and more recalcitrant to treatment. It all linked up together, everything grew clear. And all at once a bottomless abyss yawned where a few minutes ago there had been that bedrock of security, lacking which it is impossible to live. So sudden was the glimpse of the abyss that his whole balance was thrown out; his mind went limp, incapable of thought. Human reason is so vitally bound up with the future that once all likelihood of a tomorrow is ruled out, and every prospect seems converging on the blind alley that is death, the faculty of thinking falls to pieces.

The old man's hands clutched at the sheets in blind, desperate panic. He tried to cry out, but in vain. The world was toppling over, dissolving into chaos, and he was being swept under, foundering in floods of darkness. Then fear forced a way across his strangled throat in a hoarse gasp that rose and fell, choked out at once.

Unable to straighten up her bent back so as to look at the bed, Mademoiselle began screaming.

"Bless and save us! What is it? What's happening, Sister?"

The nurse did not answer. The old woman fled from the room.

Somebody must be sent for—but who? Antoine was away. Then she remembered the priest, Abbé Vécard.

The servants were still in the kitchen; they had heard nothing. At Mademoiselle's first words Adrienne crossed herself, while Clotilde, pinning her shawl round her shoulders and picking up her purse and keys, made for the door.

# II

THE ABBÉ VÉCARD lived in the Rue de Grenelle, near the administrative offices of the Archbishopric, where he was now in charge of the Department of Diocesan Charities. When Clotilde came he was still up, working at his desk. She had kept her taxi and, a few minutes later, they were at M. Thibault's door.

Perched on one of the hall chairs, Mademoiselle was waiting for them. At first the priest failed to recognize her, so different she seemed without the braids encircling her forehead; tightly drawn back, her hair fell squirming down her dressing-jacket in corkscrew wisps.

"Please, M. l'Abbé," she pleaded, "oh, please go to him at once, to make him less afraid."

Nodding to her, without stopping, he went to the sick-room.

M. Thibault had flung away the counterpane; to get-away from this bed, from this accursed house, was now his one idea— anywhere to escape the Thing hounding him down. He had got back his voice and was hurling abuse at the women.

"Filthy strumpets! Bitches! Ah, I know all about you and your beastliness!"

Suddenly his eyes fell on the priest standing in the doorway, lit up by the hall lamp. He showed no surprise, and merely paused a moment before crying:

"Not you! I want Antoine. Where's Antoine?"

Dropping his hat on a chair, the priest moved quickly forward. Impassive as ever, his features did not reveal how deeply he was moved; only the slightly raised arms, the half-opened hands, conveyed his longing to help his old friend. Going up to the bed, without a word, in all simplicity, he made the sign of benediction.

Then his voice rose through the silence, saying the Lord's Prayer:

*"Pater noster, qui es in ccelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum.*
*"Fiat voluntas tua sicut in coelo et in terra!'*

M. Thibault had ceased tossing to and fro and was gazing up at the Abbé. His lips began quivering and a wry look settled on his face, the look of a child who is on the brink of tears. His head swayed slowly this side and that, then sank onto the pillow. Gradually the sobs, which sounded like suppressed guffaws, grew fewer, ceased altogether.

Meanwhile the Abbé had gone up to the nun.

"Is he in much pain just now?" he asked in a low voice.

"Not much. I've just made an injection. Usually the pain doesn't come back till after midnight."

"Good. Leave us alone now. But please ring up the doctor," he added with a gesture that seemed to imply: "I can't work miracles!"

Quietly Sister Céline and Adrienne left the room.

M. Thibault seemed almost unconscious. Before the priest had come he had sunk thus several times into a sort of coma. But these welcome lapses never lasted long; abruptly he came back to the surface, where panic lay in wait for him, and once more with a new lease of strength began the desperate struggle.

The priest guessed that the lull would be brief; he must make the most of it while it lasted. He felt the blood coming to his head; of all the duties of his calling, ministration to the dying was the one he dreaded most.

He went up to the bed.

"You are suffering, my friend. You are going through an hour of bitter trial. Do not try to fall back on yourself, but open your heart to God."

M. Thibault turned towards his confessor, and there was such anguish in his look that the priest's gaze faltered. For a moment the sick man's eyes darkened with anger and malevolent contempt. Only for a moment. The look of dreadful fear came back almost immediately. And now it was so terrible in its intensity that the priest could not face it, and turned away.

The dying man's teeth were chattering; he was muttering feebly: "Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me! I'm so frightened."

The priest pulled himself together.

"I have come to help you," he said in a gentle voice. "First, let us pray. Let us invoke God's presence in ourselves. Now, my friend, we will pray together."

M. Thibault cut him short. "But … but …! Don't you see? I'm … I'm at the point …" He dared not affront death by naming it.

Frantically his eye ranged the dark corners of the room. Was there no help, none anywhere in all the world? The shadows were deepening, deepening round him. From his lips came a scream that jarred the silence, and to the priest was almost a relief. Then, with all his might, he shouted:

"Antoine! Where's Antoirie?" The Abbé made a vague gesture. "No, I don't want you. Antoine!"

The priest changed his methods. Drawing himself up, he gazed sadly down at the furious face on the pillow, and with a sweeping gesture, as if he were exorcizing a man possessed, blessed him a second time.

His calmness was the last straw for M. Thibault. Propping himself on an elbow, despite the agony the effort cost him, he shook his fist.

"Ah, the swine! The ruffians! And now you and your claptrap— I've had enough of it." Then a despairing sob broke from his lips. "I'm … I'm dying, dying, I tell you! Will no one help me?"

The Abbé gazed down, and did not contradict him; convinced though the old man was already that his end was near, the priest's silence came as a final blow. Shaking from head to foot, feeling what little strength remained ebbing away, unable even to keep back

the saliva dribbling down his chin, he kept on repeating in a tone of pitiful entreaty, as though perhaps the priest had not heard him, or had failed to understand:

"I'm dying. I'm dy-ing."

The Abbé sighed, but made no gesture of denial. It is not always the truest charity, he thought, to lavish vain illusions on the dying; when the last hour is actually at hand, the only remedy against the terrors that invest it is not to deny its onset—against which the body, warned by instinct, is already up in arms—but to look death in the eyes, and be resigned to meet it.

He let some seconds pass, then, mustering his courage, said in clear, even tones:

"And supposing it is so, my friend. Is that a reason to be so terribly afraid?"

The old man fell back onto the pillow, as if he had been struck in the face.

"Oh, dear me!" he whimpered. "Oh, dear me!"

All was lost now; the storm had broken, sweeping him from his last foothold; there was no refuge anywhere, he was sinking, sinking …! And the last gleam of consciousness served only to reveal the black gulf of non-being. For other people death was a vague notion that did not touch them personally, one more counter in the common coin of words. For him it was the Now and Here, the one thing real— himself! Dazed and dilated, his eyes peered into the sheer abyss; then very far away, on the other side of nothingness, he saw the priest's face, the face of a living man, denizen of another world. He was alone, cut off from the world of men. Alone with his fear, plunged in the nethermost depth of loneliness.

Through the stillness came a voice, the priest's.

"Reflect! It was not God's will that death should steal on you unawares, *sicut latro*, like a thief in the night. Surely then, you should prove yourself worthy of this grace—for a grace it is, and the greatest God can bestow on us, miserable sinners—that on the threshold of eternal life a warning should be granted."

From an infinite distance M. Thibault listened to the words that, like weak waves fretting a rock, beat on the brain that fear had turned to stone, and for a moment, by mere force of habit, his mind sought refuge in them, in the idea of God. But the impulse died still-born. Eternal Life, Grace, God—the words had lost all meaning, dwindled to futile sounds that had no relevance to the terrible reality.

"Let us thank God," the Abbé continued. "Blessed are those whom He snatches from their earthbound cravings; blessed are those who die in the Lord. Let us pray, my friend. Let us pray together, with all our hearts, and God will help you in your time of trouble."

M. Thibault swung his head round. Under his terror a vestige of rage was seething still. Had he been able, how gladly he would now have crashed his fist into the priest's face! Blasphemies rose to his lips.

"God? What's that? What help? It's sheer nonsense when you come to think of it. Isn't it He, precisely, whose will it is that I …?" The words choked in his throat. "What help can I expect of Him, tell me!" he shouted furiously.

His taste for controversy had come back to him so strongly that he forgot that his agony of mind had made him deny God just a moment before. "Ah, why should God treat me thus?" he groaned.

The Abbé shook his head. "Remember the words of the *Imitation of Christ*: 'In the hour when thou deemest thyself very far from Me, then it is often I am nearest thee.' "

M. Thibault pondered. After some moments' silence he turned to his confessor; and now he made a gesture of distress.

"Abbé, Abbé!" he pleaded, "Do something—pray—anything at all! Surely it can't be possible that I …? Save me, oh, save me!"

The Abbé drew up a chair to the bed, sat down, and clasped the swollen hand, the least pressure on which left a pale imprint.

"Ah," the old man cried, "you'll see what it's like, my friend, one day—when your turn comes!"

The priest sighed. "No one can say: 'I shall be spared temptation,' but I pray God to send me, in the hour of death, a friend who will help me to overcome my weakness while there is yet time."

M. Thibault shut his eyes. The movements he had been making had irritated the bed-sores in the small of his back, and they were smarting like fire. He stretched himself out in the bed; now and again a feeble groan escaped his clenched lips: "Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!"

"Consider now!" the priest began in his measured, melancholy tones. "You, as a Christian, knew well this life on earth must end. '*Pulvis es* …' Had you forgotten that this mortal life does not belong to us? You are protesting now; as if you were being robbed of something that was yours in your own right. Yet you knew our lives are only lent us by our Maker. It may be that the hour has come when you shall be required to pay your debt; how ungrateful it would be, my friend, to haggle!"

Through his half-opened eyelids M. Thibault shot a malevolent glance at the priest. Then, very slowly, his gaze roamed round the room, pausing on all the things he recognized so easily despite the feeble light, things that were his, that he had seen—seen and possessed—so many and many a day.

"To leave all that?" he murmured. "No, I don't want to." A sudden tremor shook the old body. "I'm afraid."

Compassionately the priest bent towards him.

"Our Divine Master, too, endured the agony and bloody sweat. And He, too, for a brief moment, doubted His Father's love, and cried, saying: '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*? My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Think, my friend; is there not a remarkable analogy between your sufferings and those of our Divine Master? But Jesus in His hour of trial took new strength in prayer. With all the fervour of His love he cried: 'O my Father, here am I. Father, I trust in Thee. Father, I yield to Thee. Not as I will be done, but as Thou wilt.' "

The Abbé felt the swollen fingers quiver. After a pause, he continued in the same tone.

"Have you reflected that for centuries, nay, for thousands of centuries, our poor human race has been working out its destiny on earth?" Then, realizing that such arguments were too vague to serve his end, he fell back on precise examples. "Only think of your own family, your father, your grandfather, and your ancestors—of all those men who went before you, lived and struggled, hoped and suffered like you; and all of them irrevocably, one following the other, at the hour appointed from the beginning, returned whence they came. '*Reverti unde veneris, quid grave est*?' Is it not a comforting thought that all creation, every one of us, returns to the bosom of the Heavenly Father?"

"Yes," M. Thibault groaned. "Only … not yet!"

"How can you complain? Only think—how many of those men I spoke of enjoyed your advantages? You have had the privilege of reaching an age denied to many. God has shown you mercy in granting you so long a life in which to work out your salvation."

M. Thibault shuddered. "That's just what is so terrible!"

"Terrible, yes. But you have less right than many another to feel fear."

Roughly the old man withdrew his hand.

"No!" he exclaimed.

"Indeed you have." The Abbé's voice was gentle, consoling. "I've watched you at work, my friend. Always, with all your heart, you have aimed at something higher than worldly gain. You have loved your neighbour, fought the good fight against poverty and sin. You have lived the life of an upright man, and death should have no terrors at the close of such a life."

"No," the dying man repeated hoarsely.

When the Abbé tried to clasp his hand again, he freed himself angrily. The priest's remarks had touched him to the quick. No, he had not aimed at something higher than worldly success. On that score he had deceived everybody, including the priest—and himself, too, almost always. In reality he had spared no effort to shine in the eyes of men. All his motives had been vile, wholly vile—under the surface. Selfishness and vanity. A thirst for riches, for ordering others about. A display of generosity, to win honours, to play a specious part. Sins of the flesh, hypocrisy, a whited sepulchre—ah, the falsehood of it all! If only he could wipe the slate clean, make a fresh start! That "life of an upright man"—he was heartily ashamed of it. He saw it now as it had really been. Too late. The day of reckoning had come.

"A Christian like you …"

M. Thibault could not contain himself. "Keep quiet, you! I, a Christian? I'm no Christian. All my life I've—I've aimed at … what? 'Love of my neighbour'? Nonsense! I've never known what it is to love—anybody, anybody in the world."

"My poor friend!" the Abbé murmured. He was expecting M. Thibault to accuse himself once more of having driven Jacques to suicide. But no, not once in these latter days had the father thought of his missing son. All he could conjure up at present was much remoter phases of his past: his youth consumed with ambition, his start in life, his early struggles, first distinctions—sometimes, too, the honours he had earned in middle age. The last ten years had already faded out into the mists of oblivion.

Despite the twinge it cost him, M. Thibault raised an arm.

"It's all your fault!" he burst out passionately. "Why didn't you warn me, while there still was time?"

Then anger yielded to despair, and he burst into tears. Like ghastly laughter, sobs convulsed his body.

The Abbé bent towards him.

"In every human life there comes a day, an hour, a fleeting moment, when suddenly God deigns to reveal Himself as a real presence and extends His hand to us. Sometimes that moment comes after a life of sin, and sometimes at the close of a long life which has passed for Christian. Who can say? Perhaps it is tonight that God, for the first time, holds out His hand to you."

M. Thibault's eyelids lifted. In the twilight of his mind a certain confusion had grown up between God's hand and the human hand, the priest's, beside him. He put forth his hand to grasp it.

"What must I do?" he panted. "Tell me what to do!"

His tone had changed; the panic terror at death's advent had gone out of it. He spoke as one who asks a question that can be answered; already tempered with contrition, the fear that still persisted in his voice could be dispelled by absolution.

God's hour was approaching.

But, for the priest, this was of all hours the hardest. He communed with himself for a while, as he did in the pulpit before beginning a sermon. Though he had given no sign of it, M. Thibault's reproach had stung him to the quick. For many years he had had spiritual charge of this proud nature; how far had his influence been effective? How had he fulfilled his task? Well, there was still time to make good the lapses—on both sides. He must lay hold of this poor, wavering soul, and guide it back to the Redeemer's feet.

Then his knowledge of the man suggested a pious expedient.

"What we must deplore," he said, "is not that your earthly life is drawing to a close, but that it was not as it should have been. Still, even if your past life has not always been a source of edification, let the leaving of it, at least, furnish a fine example of a truly Christian end. Let your bearing, when that moment comes, be a pattern for all who have known you, a pattern to observe and to imitate!"

The dying man made a movement and freed his hand. The priest's words were sinking in. Yes, let it be said that Oscar Thibault had had a noble end, worthy of a saint. He locked his fingers awkwardly, and closed his eyes; his under-jaw, the priest observed, was trembling. He was praying God to grant him the grace of an edifying death.

Now fear was giving way to a vague dejection, a sense of feebleness; he was a small, pathetic atom amongst myriads of others, all ephemeral like him. But after those cataclysms of terror, there was some relief in this self-pity.

The Abbé raised his head.

"The Apostle Paul has bidden us not to be sorry, as men without hope. You, my poor friend, are amongst those men. How sad that, at this crucial hour, your faith should have forsaken you! You have forgotten that God is your Father before He is your Judge, and you do your Father grievous wrong to doubt His mercy."

The old man gazed at him with troubled eyes, and sighed.

"Come now, take heart!" the priest continued. "Be assured of the divine compassion, and remember that, granted sincere and thoroughgoing repentance, a pardon given in the extremity of death will cancel the sins of a lifetime. You are one of God's creatures; does He not know, better than we do, the clay in which He has shaped us? For, mind you, He loves us as we are; and this assurance should be the cornerstone of our courage and our confidence. Yes, *confidence*; for in that word lies the whole secret of a Christian death. *'In te, Domine. speravi.'* The Christian trusts in God, in His goodness and infinite compassion."

The Abbé had a manner of his own, placid yet weighty, of emphasizing certain words; whenever he used them, his hand would rise with a slight gesture that added to their force. Yet there was little warmth in his monotonous delivery, any more than in the long-nosed, impassive face. And it was proof of the essential virtue of these hallowed words, it showed how centuries of usage had formed them to the exact requirements of the deathbed, that their effect was so immediate on such panic and revolt as M. Thibault's.

His head had sunk, and his beard was brushing his chest. Stealthily a new emotion was permeating him, an emotion less sterile than self-pity and despair. Tears were rolling down his cheeks again, but tears of joy; and all his spirit yearned towards the Omnipotent Consoler. Now his one desire was to lay down the burden, yield his life to Him who gave it.

But then he clenched his teeth; the pain had come on again, shooting through his leg, from the thigh downwards. He ceased listening, stiffened. After a moment the pain died down.

"… like the climber," the priest was saying, "who has reached the summit and looks back to see the path that he has travelled. And what a sorry retrospect is a man's life! A series of struggles, never ending, unavailing, in a preposterously narrow field of action. Vain activities, tawdry pleasures, an undying thirst for happiness that nothing, nothing in the world can quench. Am I exaggerating? Such was your life, my friend; such, indeed, is the lot of every man on earth. How can a being created by God be content with a life like that? Has it anything worthy of an iota of regret? Very well! To what, I ask you, is it that you cling so much? Is it to your suffering body,, this weak, miserable body, that always plays you false, that shirks its proper functions, that nothing can safeguard from pain and decay? Ah, let us face the facts! It is a blessing that after being so long enslaved to our vile bodies, held prisoner by them, we can at last discard them, slough our mortal skins, cast them away, and leave them like a beggar's rags upon the wayside."

For the dying man the words had such immediate cogency that all at once the prospect of escape seemed utterly delightful. And yet —what was this new-found solace but once more the life-impulse, the stubborn hope of survival under a new disguise? And it struck the priest, whose insight had not failed him, that the prospect of another life, of living for eternity in God's presence, is as necessary in the hour of death, as in life the certainty of living the next moment.

After a brief silence the Abbé spoke again.

"Turn your eyes Heavenwards now, my friend. Now you have judged how little it is, what you are leaving, see what awaits you! An end of all the pettiness of life, its harshness and injustice. And ended, too, its trials and responsibilities. Ended, those daily acts of sin, with their aftertaste of remorse. Ended, that anguish of the sinner torn between good and evil. There, in the Kingdom of Heaven, you will find peace and plenitude, and the rule of divine order. You are leaving behind the things that are corruptible, to enter into the realm of things everlasting. Do you understand, my friend? '*Dimitte transitoria, et quaere aeterna*! You were afraid of dying; your imagination pictured some vague horror of great darkness. But a Christian death is just the opposite of that; it opens out a vista of unfading light. It brings us peace, the peace that passes understanding, rest eternal. What am I saying? It does more than that. It brings Life to its perfection, consummates the union of human and divine. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' Not merely an escape, a sleep, or a forgetting; but an awakening, the opening of a flower. To die is to be born again. Death is a resurrection to a new life, in the fullness of understanding, in the communion of the saints. Death, my friend, is not merely the rest that nightfall brings when the labourer's task is done; it is a progress upward and onward into the light of an eternal dawn."

While the priest was speaking, M. Thibault had nodded several times, approvingly. Now a smile was hovering on his face. The shadows had lifted, a dazzling effulgence was kindling facets of the past. With his mind's eye he saw himself a little boy kneeling at the foot of his mother's bed, this very bed on which he now was lying; his mother was clasping his childish fingers while in the radiant light of a summer morning he repeated one of the prayers which first had opened heaven to him: 'Gentle Jesus, who art in Paradise …" He saw himself at his first communion, trembling with awe before the Host, for the first time vouchsafed to him. And then he saw himself as a young man, one Whit-Sunday after mass, walking with his fiancee up the garden path at Darnetal, between the peonies. Back with those sunny memories, he had forgotten his old, dying body; he was smiling.

Not merely had all fear of death departed, but what troubled him just now was that he had still to live, if only for a little while. The air of this world had become unbreathable. "A little patience," he thought, "and I'll have done with it all." It seemed to him that he had discovered his true centre of gravity, had reached the vital core of his being; he had found himself at last. And this gave him happiness such as he had never known before. True, his energies seemed broken up, dispersed, lying as it were in havoc round him. What matter? He had ceased to belong to them; they were the rags and tatters of an earthbound being, with whom he felt that he had broken for good and all; and the prospect of a still more complete disruption, very near at hand, gave him an intense delight—the only joy of which he now was capable.

The Holy Spirit was hovering in the room. The Abbé had risen, full of thankfulness to God. And with his humble gratitude mingled a very human self-satisfaction—like that of a lawyer who has won his suit. No sooner was he conscious of this feeling, than he upbraided himself for it. But this was no time for self-analysis. A sinner was about to appear before his Maker.

Bowing his head, he folded his hands under his chin and prayed aloud:

"O Lord, the hour has come. Father of mercies and God of all comfort, I beseech Thee to vouchsafe this last grace, and grant me to die in peace and in Thy love. *De projundis*, out of the darkness, from the deep pit where I lay trembling with dread, *clamavi ad te, Domine*, have I called to Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. The hour has come; I am on the brink of Thy eternity, when at last I shall see Thee face to face, Almighty God. Consider my contrition, accept my prayer, and let me not be outcast in my unworthiness. Let Thy gaze fall upon me, pardoning my sins. *In te, Domine, commendo*. Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. My hour has come. Father, O Father, forsake me not."

The dying man's voice came like an echo: "Forsake me not."

There was a long silence. Then the Abbé bent over the bed.

"Tomorrow morning I will bring the holy oil. Meanwhile, my friend, make your confession, so that I may give you absolution."

M. Thibault's swollen hps began to move; with a fervour he had never shown before, he stammered a few phrases, in which the confession of his sins had less place than a passionate avowal of repentance. Then, raising his hand, the priest murmured the words that wash all sins away.

" '*Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*.' "

The man on the bed was silent. His eyes were wide open—open as if they were never to close again—and in his gaze there was at yet only the faintest hint of questioning or wonder. The bland innocence of the eyes made the dying old man look strangely like the pastel portrait of Jacques, hanging on the wall above the lamp.

He felt the last threads linking his soul to the world of men strained almost to the point of snapping; but their tenuity, their brittleness, filled him with abounding joy. He was no more now than a frail flame gently flickering out. Life was flowing on without

him, as a river goes on flowing after the swimmer has made the further shore. And he felt not only beyond life, but beyond death as well. He was rising, floating up into a zenith, bathed, as is sometimes a midsummer-night sky, with supernatural light.

There was a knock at the door. The Abbé ceased his prayer, crossed himself, and went towards it. The doctor had just come; Sister Céline was with him.

"Please continue, M. l'Abbé," Thérivier said, when he saw the priest.

The Abbé caught the nun's eye, and discreetly moved aside.

"Come in, doctor," he said in a low voice. "I've finished."

Thérivier went up to the bed, rubbing his hands. He thought it best to assume a hearty, hopeful tone—his bedside manner.

"Well, well? What's the trouble tonight? A touch of fever, eh? That's the new injection doing its job, of course." Stroking his beard, he glanced at the nun, as if calling her to witness. "Antoine will be back any moment. Meanwhile, there's no need to worry. I'll put you right. That new serum, you know …"

Without saying a word, M. Thibault watched this man lying to him. He could see through it all now—the doctor's cheerfulness-to-order, his professional play-acting. He was no longer taken in, as he had been too often and too readily, by these infantile "explanations." The make-up had worn thin; he knew them all for what they were: mummers in a macabre comedy that they had been playing for his benefit, for months. Was Antoine really coming back? Could anything they said be trusted? In any case, it was all the same to him. Nothing mattered; nothing whatever mattered now.

It did not even surprise him to read so clearly other people's minds… . The universe was a closed system, something apart, remote, in which he, the dying man, had no place. He stood outside it all. Facing the great mystery alone. Alone with his Creator. So utterly alone that even God's nearness left him still alone.

Unwittingly he had let his eyelids fall. He had ceased caring to distinguish vision from reality. A great peace, murmurous with music, had descended on him. He submitted to the doctor's tedious examination without a murmur; inert, aloof, indifferent—in another world.

# III

IN THE night train that was taking them back to Paris, the two brothers had long given up any idea of sleep; but each, lying back in his corner seat, half stupefied by the stuffy air in the dimly lit compartment, persisted in feigning slumber, so as to be left alone to his own devices as long as might be.

Antoine's anxiety was keeping him awake. Now that he had started on the return journey, the alarming state in which he had left his father had come back vividly to his mind and, through the long hours of semi-darkness loud with the roaring wheels, his imagination ran riot, picturing the worst. But steadily, as the train came nearer Paris, his fears diminished; once he was on the spot, he could attend to the situation, take charge again. Then another complication crossed his mind. How should he announce to M. Thibault the fugitive's return? How let Gise know? The letter he proposed to send immediately to London was not an easy one to write; he would have to inform Gise not only that Jacques was safe and sound and had been traced, but that he had returned to Paris; nevertheless, somehow she must be prevented from rushing home at once.

Someone uncovered the ceiling-light; the passengers in the car began to stretch their limbs. Jacques and Antoine opened their eyes, looked at each other. The expression on Jacques's face, resigned yet hagridden, was so poignant that Antoine felt a swift compassion.

He tapped his brother's knee. "Slept badly, eh?"

Jacques made no attempt to smile; with a vague gesture of indifference he turned towards the window and relapsed into a silent lethargy which, it seemed, he had neither the power nor the will to shake off. The train sped through the suburbs, still in darkness. A hasty cup of coffee in the dining-car—grinding brakes—the platform in the grey chill before dawn—a few steps in Antoine's wake as he hunted for a taxi—there was a curious unreality about it all; each successive act seemed blurred in the dank, fogbound air, yet guided by some dark necessity that spared him conscious acquiescence.

Antoine said little, just enough to tide over the difficult moment, making only casual remarks which Jacques did not have to answer. Indeed, he managed to give such a matter-of-fact air to the whole proceedings that Jacques's homecoming took the aspect of a perfectly ordinary event. Jacques found himself alighting on the pavement, then standing in the entrance-hall, without having any clear idea of what was happening, even of his own supineness. And when Léon, hearing the door open, stepped out of the kitchen, it was with perfect self-possession, though without meeting his servant's startled gaze, that Antoine bent above the pile of letters on his hall-table, and remarked in a completely casual tone:

"Good morning, Léon. M. Jacques has come back with me. You'd better …"

Léon cut him short.

"Haven't you heard, sir? Haven't you been upstairs yet?"

Antoine stiffened up; his face was white.

"M. Thibault's been taken worse, sir. Dr. Thérivier's spent the night here. I hear from the maids that …"

But Antoine had already rushed out of the flat. Jacques remained standing in the hall; the impression that he was living in a dream, a nightmare, grew stronger. After a brief hesitation, he darted forward, and followed his brother.

The staircase was in darkness.

"Quickly!" Antoine panted as he pushed Jacques into the elevator.

The metallic clang as the outer door sprang to, the brittle click of the glazed doors closing, the drone of the motor as the cage began to rise—all those well-remembered sounds, following immutably in the same order and now, after what seemed like centuries, echoing in the past, one after another, carried Jacques back to his youth. And suddenly came a vivid, galling memory: that bygone day when he had been pent in this selfsame cage with Antoine, trapped and tamed, after being brought back from Marseille and his escapade with Daniel.

"Wait on the landing," Antoine whispered.

Chance outwitted his precautions. Mademoiselle, who was fluttering distractedly to and fro about the flat, heard the elevator stop. Antoine —at last! She ran to the door as fast as her bent back permitted, saw four feet, stopped in amazement, and recognized Jacques only when he bent to kiss her.

"Bless and save us!" she exclaimed, but without much real wonder. For the past twenty-four hours she had been living in a state of such immense bewilderment that no new surprise could take effect on her.

All the lights were on in the flat, all the doors open. From the study a flabbergasted face peered out, M. Chasle's; blinking, he launched his usual "Ah, so it's you!"

And suitably enough, for once, Antoine could not help thinking. Paying no attention to his brother, he hurried off to the bedroom.

There all was darkness, silence. The door stood ajar; as he threw it open, he saw at first only the faint glow of a bedside lamp; then, on the pillow, his father's face. Despite the shut eyes and the immobility, the old man was unmistakably alive.

Antoine went in. No sooner had he crossed the threshold than he saw grouped round the bed, as if something had just happened, Sister Céline, Adrienne, and a second nun, an elderly woman whom he did not know.

Thérivier emerged from the shadows, buttonholed Antoine, and led him into the dressing-room.

"I was afraid you wouldn't get back in time," he said hurriedly. "Look here, Antoine, his kidney is blocked up. No longer secreting. Not a drop. And I'm sorry to say the uraemia has reached the convulsive stage. I've spent the whole night here, so as not to leave the women by themselves; if you hadn't come, I was going to send out for a male nurse. He's had three acute attacks since midnight—the last of them a very bad one."

"When did the kidney stop working?"

"Twenty-four hours ago, it seems, from what the sister tells me. Since yesterday morning. Naturally she's stopped the injections."

"Naturally," Antoine repeated, but with an air of hesitation.

Their eyes met; Thérivier read Antoine's thoughts easily enough. "When for two months on end we've been deliberately injecting poison into a sick man who has only one kidney working, it's perhaps rather late in the day to develop scruples …"

Thérivier craned forward, an arm extended in expostulation. "All the same, old man, we aren't murderers. One can't go on pumping morphine into him in the middle of an attack of uraemia."

Obviously. Antoine nodded, but said nothing.

"Well, I'm off now," Thérivier said. "I'll ring you up some time before twelve." Then suddenly he added: "By the way, how about your brother?"

Antoine half closed his eyes, then, as he opened them again, a sudden gleam lit up the golden-yellow irises.

"I've found him," he said with a quick smile. "What's more, I've brought him back. He's here."

Thérivier thrust his plump hand into his beard, and his shrewd, merry eyes scanned Antoine's face. But it was not the place or time for questions. Sister Céline had come in, bringing Antoine's white coat. Thérivier glanced at the nun, then at his friend.

"Well, then, I'm off!" And added bluntly: "You've a hard day before you."

Antoine frowned and turned to the sister. "He's in terrible pain, isn't he, without the morphine?"

"I'm applying very hot fomentations. Mustard-plasters." Seeing Antoine's sceptical expression, she added: "It relieves the pain a bit, you know."

"Anyhow, I hope you put some laudanum on the fomentations. No?" He knew only too well that, without morphine … But never would he acknowledge he was beaten. "I've all that's needed downstairs," he said to the nurse. "I'll be back right away." Then he turned to Thérivier. "Come on, we'll go down together."

Crossing the flat, he wondered what Jacques was up to; but he had no time to give to his brother now.

The two doctors went down the stairs in silence. At the bottom step Thérivier held out his hand. As Antoine took it he asked abruptly:

"Tell me, Thérivier—frankly, what's your prognosis? Surely the end is bound to come pretty quickly, eh?"

"Bound to, if we can't stop the uraemia."

Antoine's only answer was to grip his friend's hand warmly. He felt confident in himself, he would see it through. It was only a matter of hours now. And Jacques had been found… .

Upstairs, in the bedroom, Adrienne and the second nun, who were watching at the old man's bedside, had failed to notice that another attack was coming on. When his gasps attracted their attention, his fists were already clenched and his neck stiffening, dragging the head back.

Adrienne rushed out into the corridor.

"Sister!"

No one. She ran into the hall.

"Sister Céline! M. Antoine! Come quick!"

Jacques had stayed in the study with M. Chasle. Hearing the cries, he ran without thinking to the bedroom.

The door stood open. He tripped over a chair. At first he could see nothing, only indistinct figures moving against the glow of the bedside lamp. At last he made out a dark mass sprawling across the bed, arms threshing the air. The old man had slipped sideways, over the edge of the mattress; Adrienne and the nurse were vainly trying to lift him back. Jacques ran up, grasped his father with both arms, and, propping a knee on the bed-frame, managed to shore up the old man's shoulders, and thrust them back into the centre of the bed. As he crouched above the sheets, holding down the huge body racked by spasms, he felt a warm chest heaving violently against his; saw, under his gaze, a mask-like face, with only the whites of the eyes showing—a face that he could hardly recognize.

Gradually the paroxysms began to lose their violence, and the blood to circulate. The pupils of the eyes came back, wavering at first, then growing fixed; it seemed as if the eyes had come to life again and were discovering the young face bent above him. Did the old man recognize his lost son? And, if so, was he still able in that flash of lucidity to distinguish between realities and the vague phantasms of his wandering mind? His lips moved, the pupils dilated. And suddenly those lustreless eyes brought back to Jacques a definite memory; it was just that expression of dim attention, that far-away look, that used to come into his father's eyes whenever he was trying to recall a forgotten name or date.

Jacques felt a tightening at his throat; propping himself on his fists, he stammered unthinkingly:

"Well, Father? How are you feeling, Father?"

Slowly M. Thibault's eyelids closed; his underlip and the tip of his beard were faintly quivering. Then his chest and shoulders began to heave with increasing violence; his face became convulsed; he burst into sobs. Sounds came from the flaccid lips like the gurgles of an empty bottle plunged in water. The old nun reached forward to wipe his chin with a wad of cotton-wool. Blinded by tears, not daring to move, Jacques stood bending over the sob-racked body, repeating mechanically, idiotically:

"Well, Father? Tell me, how are you feeling now?"

Antoine, who was coming in followed by Sister Céline, stopped short when he saw his brother. He could not imagine what had happened; in any case, he did not pause to find out. He was carrying a half-filled graduate. The nun had a basin and towels.

Jacques straightened up. The others thrust him aside, grasped the sick man, and began turning back the sheets.

He retreated to the far end of the room. No one took any notice of him. What was the point of staying there, hearing his father's groans, watching his agony? None. He moved to the door and crossed the threshold with a sense of deliverance.

The passage was dark. Where was he to go? There was the study, but he had had his fill of the company of M. Chasle, who was self-installed there, riveted to his chair, his shoulders rounded, hands splayed on his knees, and smiling the angelic smile of a martyr *in extremis*. Mademoiselle was even more maddening; bent double, with her nose to the ground, she went sniffing her way from room to room like a lost dog, trailing after everyone who crossed her line of vision. Small as she was, and large as was the flat, she made it seem overcrowded.

There was only one room unoccupied, Gise's room. As she was away in England, why not take refuge there? Jacques tip-toed in, and locked the door.

Immediately he felt a vast relief; at last he was alone after a day and a night of continuous strain. The room was cold and the lights would not come on. The shutters were closed and the belated half-light of a December morning was glimmering across the slats. For

a while he could not associate this darkened room with any memory of Gise. He stumbled against a chair, sat down. Folding his arms for warmth, he stayed there, huddled up, his mind a blank.

When he came out of his doze, daylight was filtering through the curtains, and suddenly he recognized their blue floral pattern. While he was asleep a whole forgotten world had come back to life around him. Paris … Gise … Each object he set eyes on had been touched at some time by his hands—in a former existence. What had become of the photograph of himself? There was a light patch on the wallpaper where it used to hang beside Antoine's. So Gise had taken it down. Offended with him? No; of course, she had carried it off with her to England. And that meant—all the trouble would begin again. Savagely he lunged forward like an animal trapped in a net, whose every struggle makes it worse entangled. Anyhow, Gise was in England. Thank goodness! And suddenly he heard himself cursing her under his breath. Yes, it was always the same thing when he thought of her; he felt degraded, humiliated.

Anything to lay those spectres of the past! He sprang up from the chair, to escape the memory-haunted room. But he had forgotten about his father, the deathbed. Here at least he had only a phantom to contend with: it was the nearest thing to solitude. He came back to the centre of the room and sat down at the table. On the blotting-pad were imprints in violet ink—her ink. With a faint stirring of emotion he tried for a moment to puzzle out the inverted writing. Then he pushed the pad aside. Again his eyes grew blurred with tears. Ah, if he could sleep, forget! He folded his arms on the table and let his head droop on them—thinking of Lausanne, his friends, his loneliness. Yes, at the first opportunity he must escape! Leave this place again, for ever! …

He was roused from his half-sleep by someone trying to open the door. Antoine was hunting for him. It was long past twelve, and for the moment all was quiet in the sick-room; this opportunity for a hasty meal must not be missed.

Two places were laid in the dining-room. Mademoiselle had packed M. Chasle off to his own place for lunch. As for her—bless and save us, no, she couldn't dream of eating, what with all the things she had to attend to!

Jacques had little appetite. Antoine gulped his food down, in silence. They shunned each other's eyes. What an eternity since they last had sat at that table, facing each other! But events were moving too precipitately to allow them time for sentiment.

"Did he recognize you?" Antoine asked.

"I don't know."

After another silence Jacques pushed back his plate and looked up.

"Tell me, Antoine …just how do things stand? What do you expect to happen?"

"Well, for the last thirty-six hours the kidneys have failed to secrete. You understand what that means?"

"Yes. And in that case …?"

"In that case, if something doesn't stop the poisoning that has ensued … well, it's hard to be definite, but I should say tomorrow, perhaps even tonight …"

With an effort Jacques repressed a sigh of relief.

"And what about the pain?"

"Ah … that's the difficulty." A look of gloom settled on Antoine's face.

He stopped, as Mademoiselle herself was coming in with the coffee. When she was beside Jacques and about to fill his cup, the coffee-pot began to tremble so violently that Jacques reached out his hand to take it. The sight of those ivory-yellow, skinny fingers, which were associated with so many of his childish memories, suddenly brought a lump to his throat. He wanted to smile towards the little old woman but, even when he stooped, could not manage to meet her eyes. She had accepted without demur her dear "Jacquot's" return, but for three years she had been weeping over him as dead and, now he had come back, could not bring herself to look this phantom frankly in the face.

"I'm afraid," Antoine continued, when she had left them, "that the pain will probably become more and more acute. Usually uremia gives rise to an increasing amount of anaesthesia, so that the end is practically painless. But when it takes this convulsive form …"

"In that case," Jacques said, "why have the morphine injections been stopped?"

"Because the kidneys have ceased secreting. A morphine injection would kill him as he is now."

The door was flung violently open. A terrified face, the maid's, looked in, then vanished. She had tried to say something, but could not get out a word.

Antoine ran out after her. An involuntary hope, of which he was frankly conscious, spurred him on.

Jacques, too, had risen, moved by the same hope. After a moment's hesitation he followed his brother out.

No, it was not the end; only another attack, but a sudden and very acute one.

The dying man's jaws were clenched so tightly that, from the door, Jacques could hear the grinding teeth. The face had turned a purplish crimson and the whites of the eyes showed between the slotted lids. His breathing was uneven and occasionally ceased altogether; the stoppages seemed never ending and, while they lasted, Jacques felt his own heart stop and, himself unable to draw breath, turned desperately towards his brother. The bodily spasm was already such that only the back of the old man's head and his heels touched the bed; yet every moment his body grew more steeply arched. Only when the muscular tension had reached its maximum intensity did it become stabilized in a vibrant equilibrium which, more than any movement, conveyed the tremendous strain to which the body was subjected.

"A whiff of ether," Antoine said. The calmness of his voice struck Jacques with wonder.

The attack was running its course. At intervals hoarse, roaring grunts, louder and louder, issued from the twisted lips. Then the head began lolling from side to side; a confused tremor set in along the limbs.

"Grasp his arm," Antoine whispered, while he seized the other wrist and the nuns struggled to hold down the legs, which now were threshing to and fro, tearing off the sheets.

The struggle went on for several minutes. Then the violence of the spasms diminished and the epileptiform convulsions grew less frequent. The head ceased rolling from side to side, the limbs relaxed, and at last the exhausted body lay flat and still upon the bed.

Then the moans began again. "Ah! Aah! Aaah! … Ah! Aah! Aaah!"

Jacques laid back on the bed the arm that he was holding. He noticed that his fingers had left their marks on it. The sleeve of the nightshirt was torn and one of the collar buttons had snapped. Jacques could not take his eyes off the wet, swollen lips incessantly moaning that dreadful "Ah! Aah! Aaah!" And suddenly everything seemed to take effect at once: his emotion, the interrupted lunch,

the fumes of ether. He felt himself retching, his cheeks turning green. With a great effort he brought himself to turn away, stumble hastily out of the bedroom.

As Sister Céline, helped by the old nun, was about to tuck in the sheets, she suddenly turned to Antoine. Holding up the top sheet, she pointed to a large moist patch, at the place where the old man had been struggling.

Antoine betrayed no feeling. But, after a moment, he moved away from the bed and leaned against the mantelpiece. Now that the functions of the kidney had been temporarily restored, the effects of the poisoning were staved off—for how long, it was impossible to say. Antoine knew very well that nothing could avert the fatal issue; it had merely been postponed. Two or three days' reprieve, perhaps. He pulled himself together; he did not believe in brooding over distasteful facts. Well, the fight would last longer than foreseen; there was no getting around it. And the longer it was to last, the greater the need for good staff-work. The energies of his helpers must be husbanded.

He decided to organize two shifts of nurses, with fixed periods on and off duty. Léon could be enlisted. He, Antoine, would be on duty in both shifts; he was determined not to quit the sick-room. Fortunately, before leaving for Switzerland, he had cancelled his engagements for some days ahead. If some emergency call came in from any of his patients, he would send Thérivier. What else was there? Ah, yes; warn Philip. And ring up the hospital. What else? He was conscious of forgetting something important. ("A symptom of fatigue. Have some cold tea on tap," he noted.) Why, of course! Gise must be told. He must write to her this afternoon. Lucky that old Mademoiselle hadn't yet spoken of sending for her niece!

He was standing in front of the fire, his hands resting on the marble mantelpiece, mechanically stretching first one foot, then the other, towards the warmth. For him planning was the equivalent of action; he had recovered his poise.

At the other end of the room, M. Thibault's groans were growing louder; the pain was setting in again, fiercely as ever. The two nuns were seated. A chance, this, not to be missed of putting through some telephone calls. But when Antoine reached the door, something made him walk back to the bed for a closer view of the dying man. It looked as if, already, another attack was coming on; M. Thibault's face was becoming more and more darkly flushed, his breath was failing… . Where had Jacques gone?

Then he heard voices in the corridor. The door opened and, followed by Jacques, the Abbé Vécard entered. Antoine noticed his brother's sullen expression; but the priest's eyes were sparkling, though his face was impassive as ever. M. Thibault's groans were coming faster; suddenly he jerked his arm forward and the finger-joints contracted with the brittle sound of cracking nuts.

"Jacques!" Antoine called, as he reached towards the ether.

The priest hesitated, then, after crossing himself discreetly, retired without a word.

# IV

ALL that afternoon, all night, and throughout the following morning the two shifts organized by Antoine took turns every three hours at M. Thibault's bedside. The first group consisted of Jacques, the maid, and the older nun; the second of Sister Céline, Léon, and Clotilde, the cook. Antoine so far had not taken a moment's rest.

The attacks were growing more and more frequent, and so terrific was their vehemence that, after each, those who had been holding down the sufferer were as worn out as he was, and fell back, gasping for breath, onto their chairs. After that they had to watch him suffer, with folded hands; there was nothing to be done. In the intervals between attacks the neuralgic pains returned with increased violence, distributed over almost every portion of the body; the ears of the watchers had not a moment's respite from the groans and screams of agony. The old man's brain was too exhausted now to grasp what was happening; sometimes, indeed, he passed into a state of raving delirium. But his nervous responses were cruelly intact and he kept on indicating by gestures each place where he felt pain. Antoine was dumbfounded by the strength that remained in the old body, bedridden for so many months. And so were the two nuns, though long experience had inured them to the vagaries of disease. They were so convinced that the uraemic intoxication could not but get the better of this extraordinary resistance that they inspected the bed several times an hour to see if it was still dry, and the kidney had not resumed its functions.

On the first day the concierge had come to ask that, if possible, the shutters as well as the windows might be closed, so as to deaden the groans, which echoed across the courtyard and spread consternation in the building. The tenant of the flat above, a young woman with child, whose bedroom was just over M. Thibault's, had been so upset as to be obliged to leave the house in the middle of the night and take shelter with her parents. So all the windows had to be kept shut. The only light was the small bedside lamp. Despite the wood-fire kept constantly burning to carry off the noxious odours, the atmosphere in the room was unpleasant to a degree. The emotions of the past three days had taxed Jacques severely, and now under the stupefying effects of the foul air and semi-darkness, he kept on dropping off to sleep for a few seconds at a time, standing, his arm in air, then waking up with a start, and completing the unfinished gesture.

Whenever he was off duty in the sick-room, Jacques went downstairs to Antoine's flat, the key of which he had got back; there he was sure of being alone. He hurried at once to his old room and flung himself fully dressed onto the sofa-bed. But rest eluded him. Across the flimsy window-curtains he saw the snow-flakes eddying, blurring the outlines of the houses and deadening all the noises of the street. And then pictures rose before him of Lausanne, the Pension Kammerzinn, Sophia, his friends. All grew confounded in his thoughts, the present and the past, snows of Paris and Swiss winters, the warmth of the room where he was now and that of his little stove, the smell of ether clinging to his clothes and the tang of resin from his pitchpine floor. He got up to try a change of atmosphere, dragged himself across to Antoine's study, and, dizzy with exhaustion, sank into an easy chair. He felt sick of everything, as if he had been kept in suspense eternally and to no purpose, torn by sterile longings that nothing could assuage, and haunted by the feeling that nowhere, nowhere on earth, was there a place where he could feel at home.

From noon onwards there were virtually no intervals between the attacks, and it was obvious that M. Thibault's condition had taken a turn for the worse. When Jacques came with his shift for his spell of duty at the bedside, he was horrified by the changes that had taken place since the forenoon. The ceaseless convulsions of the facial muscles and, most of all, the swelling caused by the toxic condition had blotted out the features. The face of the dying man had become almost unrecognizable.

Jacques would have liked to put some questions to his brother, but their several tasks gave them no respite. Besides, he was far too exhausted, too weary in mind and body, to make the effort of framing intelligible phrases to express his thoughts. Sometimes, between two attacks, racked by compassion for this never-ending agony, he would gaze at his brother with haggard, questioning eyes; but always Antoine gritted his teeth and looked away.

After a series of convulsions that seized the old man with increasing violence, Jacques's nerves gave way, and a fit of blind rage came over him. His forehead dripping with sweat, he strode towards his brother, gripped his arm, and dragged him to the far end of the room.

"Look here, Antoine! This has got to stop, you can't let it go on." His voice was vibrant with reproach.

Antoine turned his head, with a slight shrug signifying helplessness.

"But, *do* something!" Jacques shook his brother's arm. "Find some way of stopping the pain. There must be something that can be done. Do it!"

Antoine's eyebrows lifted a shade contemptuously; then he gazed towards the bed, whence long-drawn, agonizing screams of pain were rising. Perhaps a hot bath might be tried; obviously that idea had crossed his mind several times already. Was it feasible? The bathroom was at the other end of the flat, next to the kitchen; the last door in a corridor which had a right-angled turn. A difficult undertaking. Still …

In a few seconds he had weighed the pros and cons, formed his decision, and was mapping out a plan of campaign. He must take advantage of one of those periods of prostration, lasting two or three minutes, which usually followed each attack. To bring it off, everything must be made ready in advance. He looked towards the nurse.

"Sister, stop what you're doing now, please, and fetch Léon. Sister Céline, too. Tell her to bring me two sheets. Two, you understand. Adrienne, will you go to the bathroom and turn on the hot water. Get the water to a hundred degrees and see it stays at that temperature till we come. Then tell Clotilde to warm some towels in the oven. And to fill the warming-pan with charcoal. Be quick, please."

Sister Céline and Léon, who had been resting, entered just in time to take Adrienne's place at the bedside. Ail attack was just beginning; it was violent, but brief.

When it was over, and a rapid but calmer respiration had followed the stertorous breathing that now accompanied the periods of convulsion, Antoine cast a rapid glance over the helpers he had mustered.

"Now's the time," he said, and added, turning to Jacques: "No hurrying, please—but there's not a second to lose."

The nuns had already begun untucking the bed; a cloud of powder rose from the sheets, and an odour of mortifying flesh filled the room.

"Get off his nightshirt quickly," Antoine commanded; then turned to Léon. "Two more logs on the fire, in readiness."

There was a feeble moaning from the bed. "Ah! Aah! Aaah!" Daily the bed-sores spread and deepened; the shoulder-blades, buttocks, and heels were an angry mass of sores which, though powdered with talc and bandaged, stuck to the sheets.

"Wait," Antoine said. With his penknife he slit the nightshirt from end to end. As the blade hissed through the cloth Jacques could not repress a slight shudder.

The whole body lay before him, naked. Huge, flaccid, sickly white, it gave the impression of being at once enormously distended, and emaciated. The swollen hands hung like boxing-gloves on the wizened arms. The queerly elongated legs had the look of bones coated with hair. A patch of coarse grey stubble mantled the chest… .

Jacques looked away. Many a time in after years he was to recall that moment, and the strange thoughts that crowded in on his brain, as for the first time he looked on the nakedness of the man who had begotten him. Then, in a flash, he saw himself back in Tunisia, reporter's note-book in hand, looking at another body, naked like this, and like this bloated, blotched with grey—the body of an old Italian, a huge, obscene monster of a man who had just hanged himself. It had been lying in the street out in the sun, and a motley horde of brats from neighbouring streets was scampering and squalling round it. And Jacques had seen the dead man's daughter, little more than a child, rush across the courtyard weeping bitterly, drive away the children with kicks and cuffs, then sprinkle handfuls of dry grass over the corpse. Out of modesty, perhaps—or because of the flies?

"Now, Jacques!" Antoine whispered.

He would have to slip his hand under the body to catch an end of the sheet which Antoine and the sister had worked underneath the hips.

Jacques obeyed. And suddenly the contact of the clammy flesh produced an extraordinary, quite unforeseen effect on him—a starkly physical emotion, far more potent than any gust of pity or affection: the self-regarding love of man for man.

"Get him in the middle of the sheet," Antoine ordered. "Right. Not so much that way, Léon; give a tug at this end. Now take away the pillow. You, Sister, lift his legs. A bit. more. Mind the bed-sores! Jacques, take your corner of the sheet, beside his head; I'll take the other. Sister Céline and Léon will hold the lower ends. Got it? Right. Let's lift him now, just to try. One, two, three—hoist!"

Hauled energetically by the four corners, the sheet bellied and rose clear of the mattress; but the weight was almost too much for them.

"Good work!" Antoine sounded almost cheerful. All of them were just then feeling the joy of action.

Antoine turned to the older nun.

"Sister, put the blanket over him. And please go in front, to open the doors for us… . Everyone ready? … Go!"

Staggering, they filed out and entered the narrow corridor. M. Thibault was screaming. For a moment M. Chasle's face showed, peeping from the kitchen-door.

"A little lower, please, at his feet," Antoine panted. "That's better. Shall we stop a bit? No? Then, carry on. Mind that closet key, you'll get caught on it. Stick it out, we're almost there. Mind the turning now." He had a glimpse of Mademoiselle and the two servants crowding up the bathroom. "Out of it, all of you!" he yelled. "There's barely room for the five of us. Adrienne, Clotilde! Now's the time to go and make the bed. Heat it with the warming-pan. Steady, now! We've got to turn, for the door. That's right. No, damn it, don't put him on the floor. Raise him! Up! More than that! We must get him over the bathtub first. Then we'll lower him gently. In the sheet, of course. One more effort! Easy does it. Lower a little. More. Yes, like that. She's filled it too full, confound her! We'll be deluged. Now lower away, everyone!"

As the bulky mass, slung within the sheet, gently descended into the bath, the water it displaced splashed over on all sides, drenching everyone and flooding the whole floor.

"Well, that's that!" Antoine panted. "Ten minutes' breathing space, thank goodness!"

For a moment M. Thibault's screams had ceased—an effect, doubtless, of the shock of the hot water; but now they started again, and shriller than ever. He began struggling convulsively; fortunately the folds of the sheet hampered the movements of his arms and legs.

In any case his restlessness gradually declined; the screams sank to a low, whimpered "Ah! Aah! Aaah!" and soon he ceased to whimper. It was obvious that he was feeling a vast relief. The little "Ah's!" sounded like grunts of satisfaction.

The five of them stood round the bath, their feet in water, thinking with dismay of the task that still lay before them.

Suddenly M. Thibault opened his eyes and began speaking.

"Ah, so it's you? No, not today …" His eyes wandered round the room, but obviously he had no idea where he was. "Let me be," he added. (These were the first intelligible words he had uttered for forty-eight hours.) Then he fell silent, but his lips went on moving as if he were saying a prayer. Now and again a weak sound issued from them. Bending his ear, Antoine caught a word here and there. "Saint Joseph … friend of the dying." And a moment later: "Miserable sinner."

The eyelids had dropped again. The face was calm, the breathing rapid but regular. It was an incredible relief to them all not to hear those screams of agony any more.

Suddenly the old man gave a little laugh, like a child's laugh, strangely crystalline. Antoine and Jacques stared at each other. What thought was stirring in the dying brain? The eyes were still closed. Then in a voice roughened by days of screaming, yet fairly clear, he sang once more the refrain of the old song, the words of which he had learned again from Mademoiselle:

"Then clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go
To where my lovely Lola
Is waiting for me now."

Like an echo he muttered: “Clankety … clinkety and clankety …” Then the voice ceased.

Antoine dared not meet his brother’s eyes. “My lovely Lola!” It distressed him to hear such words at such a moment on his father’s lips. What must Jacques be thinking?

Jacques had exactly the same feeling; his discomfort came not from what he had heard but from the fact that he had not been alone to hear it. Each of them felt embarrassed, not for himself but for the other… .

The ten minutes were up.

While watching the bath, Antoine had been planning the return journey.

“It’s out of the question shifting him in that wet sheet,” he said in an undertone. “Léon, fetch the mattress belonging to the folding bed. And ask Clotilde to bring the towels she has in the oven.”

They laid the mattress on the wet tiles of the floor. Then, under Antoine’s directions, they grasped the four corners of the sheet, heaved the heavy body out of the bath and lowered it, dripping, onto the mattress.

“Sponge him—quickly!” Antoine said. “Right. Now wrap him up in the blanket and slip the dry sheet under. Hurry up, or he’ll catch cold!”

No sooner spoken than he thought: “And what matter if he does catch cold?”

He glanced round the bathroom. There was not a dry spot anywhere; mattress, sheets, and towels sprawled in pools of water. In a corner a chair lay upside-down. The little room looked as if a free-for-all had taken place in it during a flood.

“Back to your places now, and—hoist!” he ordered.

The dry sheet bulged, and the body swayed for a moment as if suspended in a hammock; then staggering, floundering through pools of water, the little procession started on its way, and slowly receded round the corner of the passage, leaving in its wake a trail of sodden footprints.

Some minutes later M. Thibault was lying pale and motionless in his new-made bed, his head in the centre of the pillow, his arms stretched limp upon the counterpane. For the first time in many days he seemed not to be in pain.

The respite was short-lived. It was striking four and Jacques had just left the bedroom, intending to go down to the “ground-floor flat and snatch a few hours’ rest, when Antoine caught him up in the hall.

“Quick! He’s suffocating. Ring up Coutrot. Fleurus 5402. Coutrot, Rue de Sevres. Tell him to send some oxygen at once, three or four containers. Fleurus 5402. Got it?”

“Hadn’t I better take a taxi?”

“No, they’ve a delivery car. Hurry up. I need your help.”

The telephone was in M. Thibault’s study. Jacques dashed into it with such haste that M. Chasle jumped from his chair.

“Father is suffocating!” Jacques cried to him as he unhooked the receiver.

“Hallo! Are you Coutrot the pharmacist? What? Isn’t this Fleurus 5402? … *Hallo!* Please connect me at once; it’s urgent, a dying man. Fleurus 5402… . That Coutrot’s? Hallo. Dr. Thibault speaking. Yes. Please send …”

Bending above the shelf on which the telephone stood, he had his back to the room. As he spoke, he looked up vaguely at the mirror on the wall. Reflected in it was an open door and, framed in the doorway, Gise stood gazing at him, mute with wonder.

# V

THE day before, in London, Gise had received the cablegram which Clotilde, with Mademoiselle's approval, had taken on herself to dispatch while Antoine was away at Lausanne. She had travelled by the early boat-train and arrived in Paris without warning anyone of her coming, had driven directly to the house, and, not daring to question the concierge, had gone, with a wildly beating heart, straight up to the flat.

Léon had opened the door. Alarmed at seeing him on this floor, she had murmured:

"And … how is …?"

"Not yet, Mademoiselle."

Someone was shouting into the telephone in the next room. "What? Isn't this Fleurus 5402?"

A tremor ran through her body. Had her ears deceived her?

"*Hallo*! Please connect me at once; it's urgent."

The valise dropped from her hand. Her limbs seemed giving way under her. Not knowing what she did, she stumbled across the hall and with both hands pushed open the study door.

Leaning on the shelf, Jacques had his back to her. Dimly she saw, or seemed to see, the outlines of his face, the half-closed eyes, wraithlike in the green depths of the tarnished mirror. So Jacques had been found again—she had never believed him dead—and he had come back to his dying father.

"Hallo! Dr. Thibault speaking. Yes. Please send …"

Slowly her gaze fastened on his, his eyes sank into hers. Then Jacques swung quickly round, still holding the receiver, from which came a drone of words.

"Please send …" he repeated. His throat was choked. With a violent effort he gulped back saliva; all he would get out was a strangled cry: "Hallo!" He had lost all notion of where he was, why he was telephoning. It cost him a prodigious struggle to reconstruct it all—Antoine, the deathbed, oxygen. "Father's suffocating," he told himself. Shrill reverberations were jarring in his brain.

"Go on! I'm listening!" An impatient voice at the other end.

Suddenly he felt a blind rage sweep over him, rage against the intruder. What was she after? What did she want of him? Why remind him of her existence? Wasn't everything over, dead and done with?

Gisèle had not moved. In the brown face, the big black melting eyes, luminous with dog-like devotion, had a tender glow, intensified by wonder. She had grown much thinner. An impression crossed Jacques's mind—so fleeting that he hardly noticed it—that she had become quite pretty.

Into the silence burst M. Chasle's voice, like a belated bomb.

"Ah, so it's you," he said with a half-witted grin.

Jacques was pressing the receiver nervously to his cheek. He could not bring himself to take his eyes off the charming figure in the doorway, but they had gone blank and betrayed nothing of his seething rage. He stammered into the telephone:

"Please send me at—at once some oxygen. Yes, by a—a delivery car. What? In rubber containers, of course. For a patient who's suffocating."

Rooted to the spot, Gise watched him, without a flicker of her eyelids. She had pictured to herself a hundred times this moment—the moment when, after the years of waiting, she would see him again, let herself sink into his arms. Well, she was living out that moment here and now. He was there, only a few yards away, but taken up by others; not hers—a stranger. And in Jacques's eyes her eyes had met a hardness, a presage of rebuff. The reality confronting her, so different from her dreams, had given her an intuition—though she was hardly conscious of it yet—that she was still to suffer by him.

He, too, while speaking, had his eyes fixed on her all the time; they seemed linked together by that mutual, unfaltering gaze. Meanwhile Jacques had straightened up; his voice became assured again, over-assured.

"Yes, three or four containers. *At once!*"

Higher-pitched than usual, his voice had an unwonted vibrancy, almost a nasal twang, a bluffness that was unlike him. "Ah, yes, so sorry, the address! Dr. Thibault, 4A Rue de l'Université. No. 4A, I said. Come straight up to the third floor. And be quick, please; it's extremely urgent."

Without haste but with an unsteady hand he hung up the receiver. Neither he nor Gise felt able to make a move.

"Hallo, Gise!" he said at last.

A tremor ran through her body. Her lips half parted in an answering smile. Then as if he had suddenly awakened to reality, Jacques moved abruptly forward.

"Antoine's waiting for me," he explained, as he hurried across the room. "M. Chasle will tell you all about it. *He* … he's suffocating. You've come at the worst possible moment… ."

"Yes," she said, drawing aside as he passed close in front of her. "Go at once, at once!"

Her eyes filled with tears. She had no clear thought, no definite regret; only an aching sense of weakness and disheartenment. Her eyes followed Jacques along the hall. Now that she saw him moving he seemed more alive, more as he used to be. When he was out of sight she clasped her hands impulsively, murmuring: "Jacquot!"

Stolid as a piece of furniture, M. Chasle had watched the whole scene and had noticed nothing. Left by himself with Gise, he felt called on to make conversation.

"Well, Mile. Gise, here I am, such as I am, at my post." He patted the chair on which he was perched. Gise turned her head, to hide her tears. After a moment he added: "We're waiting to begin."

His tone was so impressive that Gise was taken aback.

"Begin what?" she inquired.

The little man's eyes flickered behind the glasses; he pursed his lips confidentially.

This time Jacques had fled to his father's room as to a place of refuge.

The ceiling-lamp was on. M. Thibault, who was being propped up in the sitting position, was a terrifying sight; his head flung back, his mouth agape, he seemed to have lost consciousness. The wide-open eyes, starting out of their sockets, were glazing. Leaning over the bed, Antoine was holding his father in his arms while Sister Céline was shoring up his back with cushions the older nun was passing to her.

"Open the window!" Antoine shouted when he saw his brother.

Cold air poured in, bathing the trance-bound face. And now the nostrils began to flutter; a little air was penetrating to the lungs. The inhalations were feeble and jerky, the expirations interminably protracted; it seemed with each slow sigh that it must be the last.

Jacques had gone up to Antoine. He whispered in his ear: "Gise has just come."

Only a slight lift of the eyebrows betrayed Antoine's surprise. Not for a second would he let his attention be diverted from the duel he was fighting with death. The least inadvertence, and that feeble breath might fail for ever. Like a boxer with his eyes riveted on his opponent, brain alert and every muscle set for action, he kept watch. Not for a moment did he pause to think that for the past two days he would have welcomed as a deliverer that last enemy whose onset he was now resisting with all his might. He had even forgotten, or all but forgotten, that the life in peril was his father's.

"The oxygen's on its way," he was thinking. "We can hold out five minutes more, perhaps ten. Once it's here … But I'll have to have my arms free, so will the sister."

He called to his brother. "Jacques, go and fetch someone else. Adrienne, Clotilde—anyone. Two will be enough to hold him up."

There was no one in the kitchen. Jacques ran to the linen-room. Only Gise was there, with her aunt. He hesitated for a moment. There was no time to lose… .

Why not? Yes. "Come, Gise!" He steered the old lady out into the hall. "Wait on the landing. Some oxygen gas-bags will be coming. Bring them to us at once."

When they entered the bedroom M. Thibault was sinking into a coma. His face had turned a purplish blue, and a brown sordes was drooling from the corners of his lips.

"Quickly!" Antoine said. "Stand here!"

Jacques took his brother's place; Gise, that of Sister Céline.

Antoine turned to the sister. "Pull his tongue forward… . No, with a towel. With a towel."

Gise had always shown a certain aptitude for nursing and had been attending first-aid classes in London. While preventing the old man from slipping sideways, she grasped his wrist, and after glancing at Antoine to see if he approved, began performing artificial respirations, keeping time with the nurse, who was pulling at his tongue. Jacques took the other arm and copied her movements. But M. Thibault's face was growing darkly suffused with blood, as if he was being strangled.

"One, two. One, two," Antoine repeated, keeping them in rhythm.

The door opened.

Adrienne ran in with one of the containers in her arms.

Antoine snatched it from her and without a moment's delay turned on the tap and applied it to the old man's mouth.

The following minute seemed interminable. But before it was over there had been a visible improvement. Gradually the breathing became stronger, more regular. And soon, unmistakably, the face was getting less blue; the circulation of the blood was coming back.

At a signal from Antoine, who, keeping his eyes fixed on his father, was gently pressing the gas-bag to his side, Jacques and Gise ceased raising and lowering the arms.

Gise could not have gone on; she was at the end of her endurance. The whole room seemed spinning round her. The smell from the bed was more than she could bear. She moved away and clung to the back of a chair to prevent herself from collapsing.

The two brothers remained bending over the bed.

Propped on the cushions, his lips kept open by the mouthpiece of the gas-bag, M. Thibault was breathing easily, his features calm. Immediate danger was over, though it was necessary to keep him in the sitting position and watch his breathing with attention.

Handing the container to the sister, Antoine seated himself on the edge of the mattress to take his father's pulse. He too was suddenly conscious of his utter weariness. The pulse was irregular and very slow. "Ah," he thought, "if only he could pass away as he now is, peacefully!" It did not strike him yet, the inconsistency between this wish and the desperate fight he had just been putting up against the onset of asphyxiation.

Looking up, he caught Gise's eye, and smiled. A moment past he had been using her as a convenient assistant, without a thought for who she was; now suddenly he felt a thrill of joy at seeing her there. Then his gaze swung back towards the dying man. And now at last he could not withhold the thought: "If only the oxygen had come five minutes later, by now all would be over."

# VI

THE fit of choking had deprived M. Thibault of the temporary relief which the hot bath might otherwise have given him. Very soon another attack of convulsions came on, and what strength the dying man had drawn from his brief repose served only to enable him to suffer more.

There was an interval of more than half an hour between the first and second attacks. But evidently the visceral pain and neuralgia had set in again with extreme intensity, for all the time he continued groaning and tossing on the bed. The third attack came on a quarter of an hour after the second, and, after that, attacks of varying violence followed in quick succession, at only a few minutes' interval.

Dr. Thérivier had looked in that morning and telephoned several times during the afternoon. When he came again, a little before nine, the paroxysms were of such violence that those who held the patient down were losing control, and the doctor hurried up to help them. But the leg he had grasped wrenched itself free, dealing him a kick that almost knocked him over. How the old man still had such reserves of strength passed their understanding.

When the convulsions had subsided, Antoine led his friend to the far end of the room. He tried to speak, and indeed managed to get out a few words—which the screams coming from the bed prevented Thérivier from hearing—then suddenly stopped short. His lips were quivering, and Thérivier was shocked by the change that had come over his face. With an effort Antoine pulled himself together, and stammered a few phrases in his friend's ear:

"Look here, old man, you can see—see for yourself. It can't go on like—this this. I can't—stand any more." There was an affectionate insistence in his gaze, as if he were appealing to his friend for some miraculous intervention.

Thérivier dropped his eyes. "Now let's keep calm!" he murmured, adding after a pause: "And let's review the facts. The pulse is weak. No micturition for thirty hours. The uremic intoxication is getting worse, and the symptoms are becoming masked. I quite understand how you're feeling. But, be patient—the end is near."

His shoulders bent, his eyes fixed vaguely on the bed, Antoine made no reply. The expression of his face had changed completely. He seemed half asleep. "The end is near!" After all, it might be true!

Jacques came in, followed by Adrienne and the old nun. It was the change of shift.

Thérivier went up to Jacques. "I'll spend the night here, so that your brother can get a bit of rest."

Antoine had heard. The temptation of escaping for a while from the sick-room, of rest and silence, of being able to lie down, to sleep perhaps, and to forget, was so strong that he was on the point of accepting Thérivier's offer. But almost at once he pulled himself together.

"No, old man." His voice was firm. "Thanks—but I'd rather not." Something within him had told him—though he could not have accounted for it—that it was his duty to refuse. He must face his responsibility alone; confront fatality alone. When his friend seemed about to protest, he added: "Don't insist. I've made up my mind. Tonight we're in full force and fairly fit. Later on, perhaps, I'll call on you."

Thérivier shrugged his shoulders. Still, as he suspected the present state of things might last another day or two, and as in any case he had the habit of always giving in to Antoine, he now made no protest.

"Very well. But tomorrow night, whether you agree or not …"

Antoine did not flinch. "Tomorrow night?" Would they still be going on—these paroxysms and screams of pain? Obviously that was possible. And the next day, too. Why not? His eyes met his brother's. Jacques alone guessed his anguish, and shared it.

Hoarse cries were coming from the bed, announcing another attack. They had to go back to their posts. Antoine held out his hand to Thérivier, who clasped it warmly, on the point of whispering: "Courage, old man!"; but he dared not, and left without a word. Antoine watched his receding back. How often had he, too, when leaving the bedside of a patient on the brink of death—after he had shaken a husband's hand, forcing his mouth into an optimistic smile, or shunned a mother's eyes—how often had he, too, once he had turned his back on them, hurried from the room with the same sense of relief that Thérivier's brisk step betrayed!

At ten that night the attacks, which were now proceeding without intermission, seemed to reach a climax.

Antoine felt that the energies of his helpers were flagging, their endurance weakening; they were getting slower and less careful in their movements. As a general rule such lapses would have spurred him on to greater personal efforts. But he had reached the stage when his morale could no longer cope with bodily fatigue. It was his fourth night without sleep since leaving for Lausanne. He had given up eating; with an effort he had forced himself to drink a glass of milk earlier in the day, but he had been living most of the time on cold tea, gulping down a cupful every few hours. His nerves were getting steadily worse, though their tension gave him a semblance—but no more—of energy. For what a situation like the present one called for—never-ending patience, coupled with bursts of spurious activity sapped by the knowledge of its impotence—was something against which his whole character rebelled. His endurance was being taxed to the breaking-point; yet he must keep on, wear himself out in never-ending efforts, without an instant's respite.

Towards eleven, when an attack was just ending, and the four of them were stooping over the bed, watching its last paroxysms, Antoine suddenly straightened up, with a movement of annoyance. Another patch of moisture was spreading on the sheet; the kidney had begun working again, copiously.

Dropping his father's arm, Jacques made a rageful gesture. This was the last straw! The only thing keeping him on his feet had been the thought that, owing to the spread of the toxaemia, the end was imminent. What would happen now? Impossible to know. It was as if, during these past two days, death had been persistently setting his trap, and each time the spring was drawn tight, the teeth about to close, the catch had slipped—and all had to begin again.

After that, he did not even try to conceal his mortification. Between the attacks, he flung himself angrily into the nearest chair, and dozed for a few minutes, his elbows on his knees and his fists against his eyes. When a new attack developed, he had to be called, tapped on the shoulder, shaken into wakefulness.

Shortly before midnight, things had come to such a pass that it looked as if the struggle could no longer be kept up. Three exceptionally violent attacks had followed in quick succession, and there were signs of a fourth under way.

It promised to be catastrophic; all the usual symptoms were present, but in a hideously intensified form. The breathing had nearly stopped, the face was congested, the eyes were starting from their sockets, the forearms tensely contracted and flexed so sharply that the hands were hidden and the wrists, folded beneath the beard, had the look of amputated stumps. All the limbs were quivering with the formidable tension, and the sinews seemed on the point of snapping under the strain. Never before had the phase of rigidity lasted so long; the seconds went by and it showed no sign of easing. Antoine fully believed the end had come.

Then a feeble, gasping breath issued from the mouth, while a frothy saliva formed on the lips. The arms relaxed suddenly, and he passed into the convulsive state. From the very start the paroxysms had a maniacal violence that nothing less than a strait-jacket could have restrained. Helped by Adrienne and the older nun, Antoine and Jacques clung to the old man's arms and legs. He was flinging himself about like a madman, and the four of them were dragged this way and that, hurled against each other, their arms half wrenched from their sockets. Adrienne was the first to let go, and after that, try as she might, could not recapture the leg she had been holding. Then, swept almost off her feet, the nun lost her balance and the other ankle broke free. Out of all constraint, the two legs beat the air; blood spurted from the heels drumming on the frame of the bed. Panting, streaming with sweat, Antoine and Jacques braced themselves to prevent the huge heaving mass from rolling off the bed.

Then, as suddenly as they had begun, the frenzied paroxysms ceased. After settling his father in the middle of the bed, Antoine stepped back some paces. His nerves were frayed to such a point that his teeth were chattering; he was shivering with cold. Going towards the fire to warm himself, he suddenly caught sight of his reflected self, lit by the firelight, in the mirror. His face was haggard, his hair in disorder, there was blind fury in his eyes. He swung round, dropped into a chair, and, letting his forehead sink between his hands, broke into sobs. No, he could bear no more… . What little capacity for reaction yet remained to him centred in a wild desire for it all to end—anything rather than to have another night, another day, and perhaps a second night to pass watching this hellish agony, for which he could do nothing, nothing …!

Jacques went up to him. At any other moment he would have flung himself into his brother's arms; but, like his energies, his feelings had been blunted, and the sight of Antoine's prostration, instead of quickening his emotion, numbed it. As he gazed down wonderingly on the twisted, tear-stained cheeks, suddenly it seemed to him he was discovering a picture from the past, the tearful face of a litde boy whom he had never known.

Then a thought which had several times already crossed his mind came back.

"Look here, Antoine! Supposing you called someone else in, for a consultation …?"

Antoine merely shrugged his shoulders. Obviously he would have been the first to call in all his colleagues if the case had presented any difficulties. He muttered some impatient remark that his brother could not hear; the screams of pain had started again, indicating that an attack would soon be coming on.

Jacques lost his temper. "But, damn it, Antoine—think of something! There must be *something* you can do."

Antoine clenched his jaws. When he raised his eyes towards his brother, they were tearless, hard.

"Yes. There's always *one* thing can be done."

Jacques understood. He did not flinch.

Antoine threw him a questioning look; then murmured:

"And you, Jacques, haven't you ever thought of that?"

Jacques gave an almost imperceptible nod. As his gaze sank deep into his brother's, he had a fleeting impression that at that moment they must be looking very much alike—with the same crease between the eyebrows, the same expression of reckless despair, the same ruthlessness.

They were in shadow, near the fire, Jacques standing, Antoine seated. The screaming was so loud that the two women kneeling beside the bed, half stunned by fatigue, could not overhear what they were saying.

After a short pause Antoine spoke again:

"What about you, Jacques? Would *you* do it?"

For all the blunt directness of the tone, there was a faint, almost imperceptible quaver in Antoine's voice. Jacques would not meet his brother's eyes. At last he brought himself to mutter:

"Really I don't know. Perhaps not …"

Antoine broke at once. "Well *I* would … and I will!"

He had sprung hastily from the chair. But now he halted and, making an uncertain gesture, bent towards his brother.

"Do you disapprove, Jacques?"

Quietly, without hesitation, Jacques answered: "No, Antoine."

Again their eyes met, and for the first time since their return from Switzerland they had a feeling that was almost joy.

Antoine went back to the fire. Extending his arms, he gripped the marble mantelpiece with both hands. He bent forward and stared into the flames.

His mind was made up. The only problem was that of ways and means, of when and how. No one except Jacques must be in the room. It was getting on towards midnight. Sister Céline's and Léon's shift would be returning to duty at one. It must be done before they came. Nothing could be simpler. A blood-letting to begin with; it would weaken the patient and induce a state of torpor—a pretext for sending off Adrienne and the old nun to take a rest before their time was up. Once he was alone with Jacques …

Patting the inner pocket of his white coat, he felt the little botttle of morphine he had had there since—since when? Since the morning of his return. Yes, he remembered now. When he had gone downstairs with Thérivier to get the laudanum, he had slipped the little bottle under his coat, on the off chance … The chance of what? It seemed as if he had had the whole programme mapped out in his mind—all he had now to do was to carry out the details of a long-thought-out plan.

A new attack was coming on. He would have to wait till it was over. Jacques, full of zeal once more, had hastened to his post. “The last attack,” Antoine was thinking and, as he went up to the bed and saw Jacques’s eyes fixed on his, he seemed to read the same thought in his brother’s gaze.

It happened that the period of rigidity was shorter than usual, but the paroxysms were no less severe.

The suffering man was tossing wildly on the bed, foaming at the mouth. Antoine turned to the nurse.

“It might ease him if we let some blood. When he’s calm again, please bring me my instrument-case.”

The effects were almost instantaneous. Weakened by the loss of blood, M. Thibault seemed to fall asleep.

The women were so worn out that they were only too glad to go off duty before the next shift came; no sooner had Antoine made the suggestion than they hastened away to snatch a little extra rest.

Antoine and Jacques were alone.

Both were at some distance from the bed; Antoine had just gone to shut the door that Adrienne had left ajar, and Jacques, without knowing why he did so, had moved away to the fireplace.

Antoine paid no attention to his brother. Just now he had not the least desire to feel an affectionate presence at his side, and he had no need of an accomplice.

He felt in his pocket for the little nickel box. He allowed himself two seconds’ grace. Not that he wished once more to weigh the pros and cons; it was a principle with him, when the time came for action, never to rehearse the arguments that had led up to it. But as his eyes lingered on his father’s face reposing on the whiteness of the pillow—the face that the long course of the malady had rendered day by day yet more familiar—he yielded for a moment to the melancholy thrill of a last impulse of compassion.

The two seconds were up.

“It would be less distasteful,” he reflected as he walked quickly towards the bed, “to do it during an attack.”

He took the bottle from his pocket, shook it, and fitted the needle into the syringe. While he did so, his eyes roved round the room. Then he shrugged his shoulders, ironically; from force of habit he had been looking for the alcohol-lamp on which to sterilize the needle.

Jacques saw nothing from where he stood. His brother’s bent back hid the bed from him. So much the better! Then, “No!” he muttered, and took some steps aside… .

His father seemed asleep. Antoine had unbuttoned a sleeve of the nightshirt and was rolling it up.

“The right arm, yes, for the injection,” Antoine murmured. “It was the left I bled.”

Nipping a fold of flesh between his fingers, he raised the hypodermic syringe.

Jacques shuddered, and pressed his hand to his mouth.

A whimper came from the sleeping man, his shoulder twitched. In the silence, Antoine’s voice:

“Don’t move, Father. It’s to ease your pain.”

“The last words,” Jacques thought, “that any voice will say to him.”

The process of expelling the contents of the glass syringe seemed interminably slow. Supposing somebody came in! Finished now? No. Leaving the needle sticking in the skin, with a deft movement Antoine detached the syringe and refilled it. The level of the liquid went down more and more slowly. Supposing somebody came in…! Another eighth of a grain. What a time it took! Only a few drops more.

Quickly Antoine withdrew the needle, then wiped clean the tiny scar from which a small pink drop was oozing. He buttoned up the nightshirt and drew back the counterpane. Surely, had he been alone, he would have bent over the pale forehead; for the first time in twenty years he found himself wanting to kiss his father. But then he straightened up, stepped back, slipped his instruments into an inner pocket, and took a look round to see that all was in order. At last he turned towards his brother; stoically calm, his eyes seemed to be saying simply: “It’s done.”

Jacques had an impulse to go up to Antoine, grasp his hand, convey his feelings by an affectionate gesture. But Antoine had already turned away; drawing up Sister Céline’s chair, he seated himself beside the bed.

The dying man’s arm lay outside the bedclothes; the hand was almost as white as the sheets and faintly quivering, like a magnetic needle. As the drug gradually took effect, the features were relaxing, the marks of many days of agony being smoothed away, and the mortal lethargy now settling on the tranquil face might have been the calm of a refreshing sleep.

Unable to fix his mind on any definite thought, Antoine had taken his father’s wrist; the pulse was weak and rapid. All his attention was absorbed in counting the beats mechanically: forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight.

His consciousness of what had just taken place was growing more and more blurred, his notions of reality lapsing into a dark bewilderment. Fifty-nine, sixty, sixty-one. The fingers on the wrist relaxed. He felt himself slipping away into a blissful nonchalance, a backwater of dreams where nothing mattered. Then came a great flood of darkness; oblivion.

Jacques dared not sit down, for fear of waking his brother. Stiff with fatigue, he kept his eyes fixed on the lips of the dying man. They were growing paler and paler, and had all but ceased to flutter with the failing breath.

A sudden fear came over Jacques; he made an abrupt movement.

Waking with a start, Antoine saw the bed, his father; gently he clasped the wrist again.

“Fetch Sister Céline,” he said after a short silence.

When Jacques returned, followed by the sister and the cook, the breathing had become a little stronger and more regular, but accompanied by a peculiar rumbling in the throat.

Antoine stood with folded arms. He had lit the ceiling-lamp.

“The pulse is imperceptible,” he said when Sister Céline came up to him.

But it was the nun’s opinion that the last moments of a life are outside the competence of doctors; experience is needed. Without replying, she sat down on the low chair, felt the pulse, and for a while contemplated the tranquil face. Then, turning, she made a sign of affirmation to Clotilde, who slipped out of the room.

The gasping intensified, with a rattling, nerve-racking undertone; Jacques’s face grew convulsed with horror and distress. Antoine, who had noticed this, was going up to him, to say: “You needn’t be anxious. He can’t feel anything now,” when the door opened.

There was a sound of whispers and Mademoiselle appeared in her dressing-jacket, leaning on Clotilde's arm, her back bent more than ever. Adrienne followed, and after her came M. Chasle on tip-toe.

Vexed by this intrusion, Antoine signed to them to stand back in the doorway, but already all four were kneeling just inside the door. And suddenly Mademoiselle's piercing voice broke the silence, drowning the gasps of the dying man.

"*O Lord Jesus, I draw nigh to Thee with a contrite and hum-ble heart…*"

Jacques sprang up and ran to his brother. "Stop her! For mercy's sake!" he panted hysterically.

But Antoine's calm, melancholy gaze sobered him at once. "Let her be," he whispered in Jacques's ear. "It's almost over. He can't hear anything." It had come back to him, that evening when M. Thibault had solemnly charged Mademoiselle to recite, as he breathed his last, the "Litany for a Happy Death"; and the memory touched him.

The two nuns were kneeling now, one on either side of the bed. Sister Céline's hand still rested on the dying man's wrist.

"*When my lips, pale and trembling, shall utter for the last time Thine adorable name, gentle Jesus, have mercy on me*"

The poor old creature had mustered up what little will-power still remained to her after twenty years of servitude to redeem the promise she had made.

"*When my face, pale and wan, shall inspire the beholders with pity and dismay, gentle Jesus, have mercy on me.*

*"When my hair, bathed in the sweat of death and stiffening on my head …*"

Antoine and Jacques kept their eyes bent on their father. The jaws were opening. The eyelids slowly drew apart, showing the glazing eyes set in a blank stare. Was it the end? Sister Céline, who was still holding the wrist and watching the face, made no sign. Mademoiselle's voice, wheezy as a punctured concertina, squeaked on indefatigably, syllable by syllable.

*"When my im-ag-i-na-tion, beset by hor-rid spectres, shall be sunk in an abyss of anguish, gentle Jesus, have mercy on me.*

*"When my poor heart, oppressed with suf-fer-ing …"*

The mouth was still opening. A gold tooth glinted. Half a minute passed. Sister Céline did not move. At last she let go the wrist and looked up at Antoine. The mouth was still gaping. Antoine bent forward at once; the heart had ceased to beat. Then he laid his hand on the tranquil forehead and very gently, with the ball of his thumb, pressed shut the unresisting eyelids, one after the other. Without removing his hand—it was as though he wished its loving pressure to befriend his father on the threshold of eternal rest—he turned to the sister and said in a voice that was almost loud:

"The handkerchief, please."

The two maids burst into tears.

Kneeling beside M. Chasle, her hands resting on the carpet so that she seemed to be crouching on all fours, with her pigtail dangling on the white dressing-jacket, Mademoiselle, unaware of what had taken place, proceeded with her litany:

"*When my soul, trembling on my lips, shall bid farewell to the world …*"

They had to help her to her feet, and lead her away. Only when she had turned her back to the bed did she seem to realize what had happened; and she began sobbing like a child.

M. Chasle, too, was weeping; clawing Jacques's arm, he kept on saying, wagging his head to and fro like a Chinese doll:

"Things like that, M. Jacques, they shouldn't be allowed."

As Antoine shepherded them all out of the room, he was wondering what had become of Gise.

Before leaving the room he gave it a final look round. At last, after so many weeks, silence had returned to it.

And suddenly, grown larger than life, it seemed, propped up on the pillows under the glare of the lamp, with the ends of the handkerchief that swathed his chin standing up in two quaint horns above his head, M. Thibault had taken on the weird, enigmatic aspect of a personage in some fantastic folk-tale.

# VII

AS HE left the flat Antoine found Jacques standing outside the entrance door, and they went down together. The whole house was asleep; the stair-carpet muffled the sound of footsteps. They did not speak; their minds were void of thoughts, and their hearts light, for there was no withstanding the sense of purely physical well-being that had come over them.

Léon, who had gone down earlier, had lit the lamps in the ground-floor flat and, on his own initiative, laid a cold supper in Antoine's study. Then, discreetly, he had retired from view.

Under the bright light, the little table, with the white cloth and the two places laid opposite each other, had quite a festive air—though neither would acknowledge it. They sat down without a word, each abashed at feeling so hearty an appetite, and trying to keep up an appearance of dejection. The white wine was well iced; the cold meat, bread, and butter rapidly disappeared. At one moment their hands went simultaneously towards the cheese-plate.

"Help yourself."

"No, after you."

Antoine cut in half what remained of the gruyere, and helped Jacques to his share.

"It's really in excellent condition, this cheese," he said, as if in self-excuse.

These were the first remarks they had exchanged. Their eyes met.

"Shall we …?" Jacques raised his finger, pointing to the upstairs flat.

"No," Antoine replied."We'll go to bed now. There's nothing to be done upstairs before morning."

As they were bidding each other good night at the door of Jacques's room, suddenly a pensive look came over Jacques's face.

"Did you notice, Antoine," he murmured, "how, at the end, the mouth keeps on opening wider and wider?"

They gazed at each other in silence. The eyes of both were filled with tears… .

At six o'clock Antoine, feeling somewhat rested, returned to his father's flat.

To stretch his legs he went upstairs on foot. "Got to send out the usual notices," he was thinking. "That's obviously right up M. Chasle's street. Then the report at the Registrar's; not before nine, however. Let's see, who exactly should be written to? Not many in the family, luckily. The Jeannereaus will look after our relations on my mother's side; Aunt Casimir will see to the rest. For the cousins at Rouen, a wire. An obituary notice in tomorrow's papers, of course. Must send a line to old Dupre; to Jean, too. Daniel de Fontanin's at Luneville; I'll write to him this afternoon; his mother and sister are staying on the Riviera—just as well they can't come. Anyhow, I doubt if Jacques will feel like going to the service. Léon can ring up the charitable societies; I'll give him a list. I'll look in at the hospital. Philip. Good Lord, I was forgetting the Institute!"

Adrienne came up. "There's two men been round, sir, from the undertaker's. They're coming back at seven. Oh, and did you know, sir," she added rather awkwardly, "Mile. Gisèle has been taken ill?"

They knocked at Gise's door. She was in bed; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes fever-bright. It was nothing serious, however. Clotilde's cablegram, coming at a moment when she was already rather out of sorts, had been the first shock; after that, the scramble for the train, and particularly the thrill of seeing Jacques again, had thrown her off her balance. The cumulative effect of these emotions on her young, unstable constitution had been so overwhelming that immediately after leaving the sick-room on the previous night, she had had an attack of violent internal pains and flung herself onto the bed. She had suffered all night, listening to every sound and guessing what was happening, but unable to move.

Her answers to Antoine's questions were so reticent that he desisted. "Thérivier's coming this morning. I'll send him to you."

Gise gave a little jerk of her head in the direction of M. Thibault's room; she felt little grief, and was at a loss for words.

"Then … it's over?" she asked timidly.

His only answer was a nod; then suddenly the thought came to him, stark, clean-cut: "And it was I who killed him!"

He turned to Adrienne. "Bring her a hot-water bottle and a poultice to start with." Then, with a smile to Gise, he went out.

He repeated to himself: "Yes, it was I who killed him." For the first time he stood back from his act, viewed it in the round. At once he added: "And I did right." His mind was working swiftly, lucidly. "No humbug now; there was an element of cowardice in it—I couldn't face that nightmare experience any longer. But because I had a personal interest in his death, was that a reason for staying my hand? Certainly not." He did not shirk the terrible responsibility. "Obviously it would be dangerous to authorize doctors to … However absurd and inhuman a rule like that may be, theoretically it's got to be obeyed to the letter." And the more he recognized the cogency and soundness of the principle as such, the more he approved of himself for having knowingly infringed it. "It's a question for one's conscience to decide. I don't want to generalize. All I say is: in this particular case, what I did was right."

He had come to the death-chamber. He opened the door softly, as he had always done, not to disturb the invalid. And as his eyes fell on the quiet face, his heart missed a beat. There was something so startling, so incongruous in having to associate the mental picture he had of his father with the notion of a corpse, familiar though this was to him. He paused a moment at the door, holding his breath. That dead thing had been his father! That body with the hands serenely folded on the breast, ennobled, calm, so grandly calm. All the chairs had been pushed back against the walls, leaving the deathbed in the centre to make its full theatrical effect. In attitudes of grief, like two mourning dark-robed figures on an ancient vase, the nuns were stationed on either hand of the dead man, whose statue-like repose lent a real grandeur to the scene, for all its artifice. That man had been Oscar Thibault, a master of men. Now that proud voice was stilled, all that power reduced to impotence. Antoine hardly dared to make a gesture, break the silence. Then again he told himself it was his work; and, as his eyes lingered tenderly on the familiar face which he had so well reconciled with silence and repose, he all but smiled.

Entering the room, he was surprised to observe Jacques, who he had thought was still in bed, sitting with M. Chasle in a corner of the room.

The moment he saw Antoine, the little secretary sprang from his chair and tip-toed towards him. Behind the tear-dimmed glasses his eyes were fluttering. He grasped both Antoine's hands and, at a loss for better words to voice his regard for the dead man, he spluttered out: "A charming—charming—charming fellow!" perking his chin towards the bed at every "charming."

"Of course one had to know him," he went on; there was a note of petulance in his tone as if he were arguing down a possible detractor. "A bit crushing at times, that's so. But so just, so very just!" He stretched forth an arm, like a witness making affirmation. "An upright judge, indeed!" Then he tip-toed back to his chair.

Antoine sat down.

A sediment of memory, settled at the deepest levels of his consciousness, was being stirred up by the odours drifting in the air. Across the reek of stale chemicals—an aftermath of recent days—and the new warm fumes of the wax candles, he could make out the musty smell of the old blue rep upholstery that dated from his grandparents' time—an odour of dry wool, to which the polish, applied to the mahogany every day over half a century, had added a faint tang of resin. He recalled the cool fragrance of clean linen that would issue from the wardrobe, were its doors opened, and the odours of varnished wood and old newspapers, mingling with a clinging pungency of camphor, that came from the chest of drawers. And he knew, too— how often had he inhaled it closely, as a little boy, when it was the only seat low enough for his small legs!—the dusty smell of the tapestry-upholstered *prie-dieu* which two generations of obeisant knees had worn to the thread.

All was still; not a breath stirred the candle-flames.

Like all the others in the room, Antoine was gazing at the corpse, fixedly, in a sort of trance. In his tired brain dim wraiths of thought were struggling to take form.

"That something which made Father a being like myself, the life that still was in him yesterday—what has become of it? Lost for ever? Or does it still exist—somehow, somewhere? In what form, then?" He pulled himself up disgustedly. "That sort of thing leads straight to muddled thinking. Really, one would think I'd never seen a corpse before! I know that idea of something 'blotted out,' of 'nothingness,' is totally unsuitable. The continuity of lives—life germinating life *ad infinitum*—that's the right way to look at it.

"Yes, I've said that to myself often enough. And yet, gazing at that dead man, I don't feel so sure. That idea of 'nothingness' forces itself on me, it seems almost defensible. When all is said and done, death is the only reality; it refutes everything, baffles all argument … preposterously."

Then, "No!" he said, with an angry shake of his shoulders. "That's morbid nonsense. When one's on the spot with *that* right under one's nose, suggestions filter in. That shouldn't count. It doesn't count."

With an effort he pulled himself together, sprang briskly up from his chair. And at once an emotion, urgent, warm, and comforting, came over him.

Signing to Jacques to follow, he went out into the passage.

"Before settling anything we must find out Father's last wishes. Come with me."

They went together to M. Thibault's study. Antoine turned on all the lights—ceiling-lamp and wall-lamps—and the sudden glare seemed like an outrage on this room where hitherto the only light had come from the green-shaded desk-lamp. As Antoine went up to the desk, the bunch of keys he had taken from his pocket jingled merrily.

Jacques kept in the background. Unconsciously he had moved near the telephone, was standing at the place where yesterday… Could it have been only yesterday, fifteen hours ago, that Gise had appeared behind him, at the door?

He cast a hostile glance round this room which for so long he had regarded as an inviolable sanctuary, where of a sudden nothing remained to guard it from intrusion. The sight of his brother kneeling like a burglar in front of the gaping drawers made him feel embarrassed. What did his father's last wishes, all those old papers, matter to him?

Without a word he stole away from the room.

He went back to the death-chamber, which had a morbid fascination for him, and in which he had passed the greater part of the night, in a calm limbo midway between dreams and waking. He foresaw that very soon he would be driven from it by a stream of plaguy intruders, and he did not wish to lose a moment of this tragic confrontation with his youth. For nothing could ever conjure up the past to him so vividly as the mortal remains of that omnipotent being whose hand had ever barred the way of his ambitions, and whose authority had now passed away, wholly and abruptly, like a tale that is told. Walking on tip-toe, he softly opened the door, entered, and sat down. Jarred for a moment, the silence of the room closed in again, and once more Jacques could plunge himself, with a mournful ecstasy, into the contemplation of his dead father.

Immobility.

That brain which day and night, for almost three-quarters of a century, had never ceased one moment to link thought to thought, impression to impression, had run down for ever. So had the heart. But the cessation of thought was what touched Jacques most nearly; how often had he bewailed, as if it were a bodily disease, the never-ceasing activity of his own mind! Even at night he felt his brain, when sleep had let the gears out, racing like a motor out of control, rumbling and roaring in his head, churning together the kaleidoscopic visions that he called dreams, when memory had retained some fleeting atoms from their endless flux. One day, fortunately, all that furious activity would stop. One day he too would be freed from the torment of thinking. Then at last silence would come; and, with the great silence, rest. He remembered that river-bank at Munich, on which he had dallied a whole night long with alluring thoughts of suicide. And suddenly, like the memory of a phrase of music, some words he once had heard came echoing through his brain: "We shall have rest." It was the closing sentence of a Russian play he had seen at Geneva. He still could hear the voice of the actress, a Russian with a childish face and candid, fanatic eyes. Swaying her little head from side to side, she had repeated: "We shall have rest." In her voice there had been a dream-like quality, with elfin, bell-like overtones; and her eyes had been a little weary, with less hope in them than resignation. "You have had no joy in life … but patience, Uncle Vanya, patience! We shall have rest … we shall have rest."

# VIII

THE influx of visitors began a little before noon; first the tenants of the other flats and various neighbours to whom M. Thibault had done kindness came to declare their sympathy. Jacques made off before any of the family appeared. Antoine, too, was out, attending to urgent calls. Each of the charity societies to which M. Thibault had belonged included some of his personal friends on its committee. The stream of callers did not cease till nightfall.

M. Chasle had transported to the death-chamber the chair which he called his office stool; it was the chair on which he had sat as he worked day after day for many years. Throughout the day he refused to leave "the deceased." He ended up by seeming as much part of the funeral appointments as the wax candles, the sprig of consecrated box, and the kneeling nuns. Each time a caller entered, M. Chasle would slip from his seat, proffer a mournful greeting to the new arrival, then hop back onto his perch.

Mademoiselle had made several attempts to shift him—out of jealousy, most likely; it vexed her to see him cutting so fine a figure of posthumous devotion. She was suffering—probably she was the only person in the household to feel genuine grief—but her sorrow took a different form: she was unable to keep still. The poor old creature who all her life had lived in others' homes, and had never possessed anything of her very own, was for the first time, perhaps, feeling the possessive instinct, and feeling it intensely: M. Thibault was *her* corpse. At every moment she would go up to the bed (which the curvature of her spine did not permit her to see in its entirety) and pull a sheet straight or smooth out a crease, murmuring the while a fragmentary prayer. Then, shaking her head and locking her thin fingers, she would exclaim as if it were something quite unbelievable:

"He has entered into rest—*before me*!"

Her heart had grown so parsimonious, so sparing of emotion, that neither Jacques's return nor the presence of Gise seemed to have stirred it to any deep response. The two young people had been so long absent from the family circle that she had lost the habit of thinking about them. Only Antoine counted, and the maids. And just now she seemed to have a curious animosity towards Antoine. In fact, she embarked on a downright wrangle with the young man when the day and hour for coffining the body had to be fixed. Antoine wanted this to take place as soon as possible; once a coffin had replaced the corpse visible in their midst, the nerves of all would be better for it. Mademoiselle protested as violently as if she were being robbed of all that remained to her on earth: the mortal remains of the master of the house, the last sad token of his physical existence. She seemed obsessed with the idea that M. Thibault's disappearance was a finale only for her and for the dead man. For the others, and most of all for Antoine, it stood for a beginning, the dawn of a new era. But before her lay no future; the past had fallen to pieces, and with it her world had come to an end.

Towards the close of the afternoon, when Antoine had walked home, exhilarated by the keen, raw air that stung his eyes and braced his sinews, he found Felix Hequét, in full mourning, standing at his door.

"No, I won't come in," the surgeon said; "I only wanted to express my sympathy with you today."

Tourier, Nolant, and Buccard had already left cards. Loiselle had telephoned. The manifestations of sympathy from his colleagues had produced such an effect on him that, when Dr. Philip called in person during the morning, and Antoine heard his "chief's" expressions of condolence, he at last realized something he had been forgetting till now: not only was M. Thibault dead, but he, Dr. Antoine Thibault, had just lost his father.

"Yes, old man, I'm terribly sorry for you," Hequét sighed discreetly. "As doctors we may be always rubbing shoulders with death, but when it visits someone near and dear to us—why, it's as if we'd never seen a death before! … I know what it is," he added. Then, straightening up, he held out his black-gloved hand.

Antoine saw him to his car.

It was the first time the parallelism of the cases crossed his mind. For the present he had no time to think "that problem" out all over again, but he now perceived that there was no denying it—the issue was a graver one than he had thought it on that previous occasion. He understood that the decisive act he had carried out on the previous day in cold blood—an act which he still wholeheartedly commended— was something which he must now assimilate, as it were, with his personality, fit into his scheme of things. It was one of those crucial experiences which have a far-reaching influence on the shaping of a man's character; and he felt that his mental centre of gravity would have to be readjusted to meet the stress of this new increment.

He returned to his flat in a brown study.

A youngster—hatless, with a muffler round his neck and cold-nipped ears—was sitting waiting for him in the hall. When Antoine came in, he stood up, blushing to the roots of his hair. It was the office-boy from the lawyer's office, and Antoine, when he recognized him, felt a qualm of compunction for never having gone to see the two boys again.

"Hallo, Robert! Come this way. Well, what's wrong?"

The boy's lips moved, he was obviously struggling to say something but too shy to get the words out. Then from under his cape, he fished out a bunch of violets and held them towards Antoine, who understood at once.

"Thanks, my boy. Thanks very much. I'll take your flowers upstairs. It was very nice of you to think of bringing them."

"Oh, that was Eddie's idea," the boy put in at once.

Antoine smiled. "And how is Eddie getting on? What about you— still as smart as ever?"

"Sure!" Robert replied briskly. His shyness had passed off at once when Antoine smiled—he had not expected him to smile on such a doleful day. Now he was all eagerness to chatter—but that evening Antoine had no time to spare.

"Look here!" he said. "Come along with Eddie and see me some day soon. How about a Sunday?" He felt a genuine affection for these two children, whom he hardly knew. "Is it a promise?" he smiled.

Robert's face grew suddenly earnest. "It's a promise, sir."

While Antoine was seeing the boy out into the hall, he heard M. Chasle's voice in the kitchen.

"Someone else who wants to talk to me," he muttered testily. "Oh, damn it! Better get it over!" He bade the little secretary enter his study.

M. Chasle trotted across the room, and perched himself on the furthest chair; a knowing smile flickered on his lips, though his eyes held a profound distress.

"What have you to say to me, M. Chasle?" Antoine inquired. His tone was friendly, but he remained standing, and began opening his letters.

"What have I to say?" M. Chasle looked startled.

Antoine folded the letter he had been reading. "Yes," he murmured to himself, "I'll try and get there tomorrow morning, after the hospital."

M. Chasle was staring at his dangling feet. In a solemn voice he declared:

"Things like that, M. Antoine, shouldn't be allowed."

"What?" Antoine was opening another envelope.

"What?" M. Chasle parroted.

"What," Antoine asked in exasperation, "what is it that shouldn't be allowed?"

"Death."

Somewhat startled by the answer, Antoine looked up and saw M. Chasle's eyes blurred with tears. The little man took off his glasses, unfolded his handkerchief, and wiped his eyes.

"I've been to see the gentlemen at Saint Roch's," he began, pausing to sigh between each phrase. "I've asked them to say masses—to satisfy my conscience, M. Antoine, no more than that. Because, speaking for myself, till further … further evidence is forthcoming …" His tears continued flowing, but sparingly, in little spurts; now and again he carefully wiped his eyes, then spread his handkerchief on his knees, folded it up along the creases, and slipped it flat into an inner pocket, like a wallet.

Abruptly he swerved to a new subject. "I'd saved up ten thousand francs …"

"Aha!" Antoine smiled to himself. "Now we're coming to it!" Then he said aloud: "I don't know, M. Chasle, if my father had time to make provision for you in his will, but have no anxiety; my brother and myself will guarantee to you, for the rest of your days, the monthly salary you were drawing here."

This was the first time Antoine had been called upon to settle a money matter in the capacity of his father's heir. It seemed to him that, all things considered, he was dealing generously with M. Chasle in pledging himself thus to support him till his death. And it was pleasant to feel himself in a position to make such generous gestures. Despite himself, his thoughts strayed to the financial aspect of the situation: what would his father's estate amount to, and what would be his share? But he had nothing definite to go on.

M. Chasle had gone scarlet. To keep himself in countenance, presumably, he had produced a penknife and begun trimming his nails.

"Not an annuity!" He spoke with an effort, emphatically, his eyes still fixed on his nails. In the same tone he added: "A lump sum, yes; not an annuity." His voice grew sentimental. "Because of Dédette, M. Antoine; the little girl you operated on. You remember her, don't you? You see, it's just the same as if I had a daughter of my own. So an annuity's no earthly use; there wouldn't be a sou for me to leave the little pet."

It all came back to Antoine: Dédette, the operation, Rachel, the sunlit bedroom, her body glowing golden in the shadowy alcove, the perfume of the amber necklace. With a faraway smile on his lips— he had dropped his letters on the table—he listened vaguely to the old man rambling on, following his movements with a casual eye. Suddenly he spun round on his heel; M. Chasle had nicked his penknife into his thumb-nail and calmly, like a man tapering off a cork, was slicing off at one stroke a crescent-shaped shred that rasped along the blade.

"Oh, stop it, M. Chasle!" Antoine exclaimed, his teeth on edge.

M. Chasle hopped off his chair.

"Yes, yes… . I'm wasting your time, of course. So sorry!"

But the issue at stake was so vitally important to him that he ventured on a last offensive.

"A little lump sum, M. Antoine, that's the thing. What I need is capital. I've had a little scheme in mind for quite a while, you know. I'll tell you about it," he murmured in a faraway voice, "some other time. Later on." Then, with a blank stare in the direction of the door, he added in a quite different tone: "Yes, it's right and proper to say masses for him, I don't deny it. But, if you ask my opinion, the deceased doesn't need any help from us. A man like that leaves nothing to chance. No, in my opinion, it's all fixed up. At this moment, M. Antoine, at this very moment …" With little rabbit-like skips he scurried to the door, nodding his grey head and repeating with an air of firm conviction: "At this very moment he—he has settled in already, in his Paradise."

Hardly had M. Chasle left when Antoine had to face the tailor, to try on his mourning suit. His weariness had come back and this tiresome parade before the looking-glass was the last straw.

He had just decided for an hour's rest when, as he was showing the tailor out, he found Mme. de Battaincourt at his door, her finger on the bell. She had rung up previously to make an appointment, and learned die sad news. So she had cancelled an engagement to come and see him.

Antoine greeted her politely, but did not invite her in. She squeezed his hand effusively, expressing her sympathy for his bereavement in a high-pitched voice and with a certain gusto. She showed no sign of leaving, and it seemed difficult to keep her standing there; the more so as she had contrived to make Antoine move back a step, and was now inside the flat.

Jacques had stayed the whole afternoon in his bedroom, the door of which was near by. It struck Antoine that his brother would hear this woman's voice, recognize it, perhaps; and the notion was displeasing to him, though why, he could not have explained. Putting a good face on necessity, he opened his study door and slipped on his coat. He had been in his shirt-sleeves and the fact of having been caught thus unawares added to his annoyance.

During the past few weeks something of a change had come over his relations with his attractive patient. She had been coming to see him oftener, on the pretext of bringing news of her invalid daughter, who was spending the winter on the north coast, with her stepfather and the English nurse. For Simon de Battaincourt had cheerfully abandoned his country home and shooting, to settle down

at Berck with the young girl and his wife—whereas the latter was always "having to run up" to Paris, on one pretext or another, and staying away several days each week.

She refused to sit down; bending lithely towards Antoine, her breast heaving with little sympathetic sighs, her eyes half closed, she was biding her time to squeeze his hand again. When looking at a man, she always kept her eyes fixed on his lips. Now, through her long lashes, she could see his gaze, too, hovering persistently upon her mouth—and her senses tingled. That evening Antoine struck her as downright handsome; there was more virility in his expression—it was as if the series of decisions he had had to make during the past few days had stamped his face with a look of self-reliance.

"You must be feeling it dreadfully, poor man!" She gave him a commiserating glance.

Antoine found nothing to reply. Ever since she had come, he had been keeping up a vaguely solemn air which, though it helped him through the interview, involved a certain strain. He continued watching her furtively; and suddenly, when his eyes fell on the breasts rising and falling under the light tissue, swift fire coursed through his veins. Looking up, he caught a glimpse of little, dancing lights flickering in her eyes; a project, tempting for all its rashness, was taking form behind the pretty forehead—but she was careful not to betray it.

"The hardest time," she said in a soft, sentimental voice, "is—afterwards. When one's caught up again by life, and finds nothing but emptiness everywhere. I hope you'll lfet me come and see you sometimes—may I?"

He looked her up and down. Then with a sudden rush of hatred, he flung out brutally, his lips twisted in a mirthless smile:

"Your sympathy is wasted, Madame. I did not love my father."

At once he bit his lip remorsefully. He was more shocked at having thought such a thing than at having said it. "And," he reflected bitterly, "who knows if it wasn't the truth she wrung from me then, the minx!"

For the moment Mme. de Battaincourt was too taken aback to reply; not so much startled by the words as cut to the quick by Antoine's tone. She moved back a step, to collect her wits.

Then, "In that case …!" she exclaimed, and began laughing. After all the make-believe, that strident laugh at last rang true.

While she slipped on her gloves her lips were working oddly, whether with suppressed rage or an incipient smile it was impossible to tell. With truculent eyes Antoine watched the enigmatic, fluttering mouth, prolonged by a slim streak of colour vivid as a scratch. At that moment, had she indulged in a frankly brazen smile, very likely he would have been unable to keep himself from throwing her out, then and there.

Reluctantly he found himself inhaling the scent with which her lingerie was liberally sprinkled, and once more his eyes lingered on the amply moulded bosom heaving beneath the flimsy blouse. And as he crudely, unashamedly pictured her nakedness, a thrill ran through his body.

After buttoning her fur-coat she moved further away, and faced him coolly, with an air of asking: "Are you afraid?"

They confronted each other with the same cold fury, the same rancour—yet with more than these; with perhaps the same sense of disappointment, the vague impression of a lost opportunity. Then, as he still said nothing, she turned her back, opened the door for herself, and went out, paying no further heed to him.

The front door slammed behind her.

Antoine turned on his heel. But instead of re-entering his study, he stayed thus for a moment, unable to move. His hands were clammy, and his ears buzzing with the tumult of his blood; greedily he inhaled the insidious perfume that lingered like a living presence in the hall, playing havoc with his thoughts. For a brief moment only the notion flicked his mind like a whiplash, that, after so brutally wounding that ungovernable nature, it was going to be a perilous feat trying to win her back. His eyes fell on his hat and overcoat hanging on the wall; he snatched them off the hook and, with a furtive glance in the direction of Jacques's room, hurried outside.

# IX

GISE had not left her bed. Her body ached all over and the least movement hurt her. From where she lay half asleep, she could hear a muffled sound of footsteps in the passage on the far side of the wall, just behind her head—the steady stream of callers entering and leaving the flat. One thought shone bright and steadfast in the twilight of her mind: "He has come back. He's here, quite close; at any moment I may see him. He's sure to come." She listened for his footstep. But all Friday, then all Saturday went by, and he did not come.

Not that Jacques had put Gise out of mind; the truth was that he was haunted, harassed by thoughts of her. But he dreaded this interview too much to go out of his way to bring it on; he was biding his time. Moreover, he had deliberately dug himself in, in the ground-floor flat, hardly going out at all, lest he should be recognized and spoken to. Only at nightfall had he gone upstairs, crept into the flat like a thief, and settled down again in a corner of the death-chamber, where he had stayed till dawn.

On Saturday evening, however, when Antoine casually asked him if he had seen Gise again, he brought himself, after dinner, to go and knock at her door.

Gise was recovering. Her temperature was almost normal, and Thérivier had told her she could get up next day. She was just dozing off when Jacques knocked.

"Well, how are you feeling?" he asked in a cheerful tone. "I must say you're looking remarkably fit." In the soft, golden light of the little bedside lamp her eyes shone large and lustrous, and indeed she looked the picture of health.

He had halted at some distance from the bed. After an embarrassed moment it was she who held out her hand. The loose sleeve fell back and he saw her bare arm glowing in the lamplight. Taking her hand, he played at being the doctor, and instead of clasping-it, patted the soft skin; it was burning hot.

"Still a touch of fever?"

"No, it's gone down."

She glanced towards the door, which he had left open as if to show that he had dropped in only for a moment.

"Feeling cold?" he asked. "Shall I shut it?"

"No. Well … if you don't mind… ."

He acquiesced good-naturedly. Now, with the door closed, they were safe from intrusion.

She thanked him with a smile, then let her head sink back; her hair made a patch of velvety blackness upon the pillow. The rather low-cut nightdress yielded a glimpse of the young curve of her breast; she put her hand up to the collar to keep it closed. Jacques was struck by the graceful outline of the wrist and the colour of her dusky skin, which, against the whiteness, had the hue of moistened sand.

"What have you been doing all day?" she asked.

"Doing? Nothing at all. I've been lying low, dodging the callers."

Then she remembered M. Thibault's death, Jacques's bereavement. She was vexed with herself for feeling so little grief. Was Jacques feeling sad? she wondered. She could not find the words of affection that perhaps she ought to have addressed to him. Her only thought was that, now the father was no more, the son was completely free. In that case, she reflected, there'll be no need for him to leave home again.

"You should go out a bit, you know," she said.

"Yes? Well, as a matter of fact today, as I was feeling rather muzzy, I took a stroll." He hesitated, then added: "Just to buy some papers."

It had not been so simple, however, as he put it; at four, chafing against these empty hours of waiting, and prompted by obscure motives of which he was not aware till later, he had gone out to buy some Swiss newspapers, and then, without fully realizing where he was going …

"I suppose you were out of doors a lot over there, weren't you?" she asked after another silence.

"Yes."

Her "over there" had taken him by surprise and involuntarily he had answered in an ungracious, almost cutting tone—which he instantly regretted. And it struck him now that ever since he had set foot in this place everything he did and said, even his thoughts, rang false.

His eyes kept straying back to the bed on which the shaded lamp cast a pale lure of light, bringing out, under the white coverlet, every graceful line of the young body: the long lithe limbs, the full curve of the flanks, and the two small round knolls of the slightly parted knees. He was feeling more and more ill at ease, and in vain tried to assume a natural air and speak in casual tones.

She wanted to say: "Do sit down!" but could not catch his eye, and dared not speak.

To keep himself in countenance, he was examining the furniture, the tiny altar faceted with glints of gold, the little decorative objects in the room. He remembered the morning of his homecoming, when he had taken refuge in it.

"What a pretty room this is!" he said pleasantly. "You didn't use to have that arm-chair, did you?"

"Your father gave it to me, for my eighteenth birthday. Don't you remember it? It used to be on the top landing at Maisons-Laffitte, under the cuckoo-clock."

Maisons! Suddenly it came back to him, that third-floor landing, the sunlight flooding through the dormer window, the flies that swarmed there all the summer and, when the sun was setting, filled the air with the buzz of a hive of angry bees. He remembered the cuckoo-clock with its dangling chains; he heard again along the silent staircase the little wooden bird cooing the quarter-hours. So, all the time he had been away, life for them had gone on just the same. And now he thought of it, was not he too "just the same," or nearly so? Ever since he was back, had he not at every instant, in each spontaneous gesture, been acting as his old self would have

acted? The special way he had of rubbing his shoes on the doormat, for instance, then shutting the hall-door with a bang; his trick of hanging his overcoat on the same two pegs before switching on the light. And, when he walked up and down his room, was not each movement little more than a latent memory revived in action?

Meanwhile Gise was quietly taking stock of his appearance: his stubborn jaw, his sturdy neck, his hands, and his expression of alert unrest.

"How big and strong you've got!" she murmured.

He turned to her, smiling. Inwardly he was all the prouder of his robustness because, throughout childhood, his puniness had galled him. Suddenly, unthinkingly—yet another reflex!—to his own surprise he solemnly declaimed:

" 'Major Van der Cuyp was a man of exceptional strength.' "

Gise's face lit up. How often had she and Jacques read those magic words together, poring over the picture underneath which they were printed! It was in their favourite adventure-book, a tale of the Sumatra jungle, and the picture showed a Dutch officer laying out, with the utmost ease, an immense gorilla.

" 'Major Van der Cuyp had been rash enough to go to sleep under the baobab-tree,' " she capped him merrily. Then throwing her head back, she closed her eyes and opened her mouth wide—for in the picture the rash Major was shown thus, snoring lustily.

Laughing, they watched each other laugh—forgetting all the present, as they delved in that quaint treasury of old memories, to which they alone had access.

"Do you remember the picture of the tiger?" she smiled. "And how you tore it up one day, when you were in a temper?"

"Yes … why was I?"

"Oh, because we'd had a laughing fit when Abbé Vécard was there."

"What a memory you have, Gise!"

"I wanted later on, like the man in the book, to have a baby tiger of my own. When I went to sleep at night I used to fancy I was nursing it in my arms."

There was a pause. Both were smiling at their childish fancies. Gise was the first to come back to seriousness.

"Still," she said, "when I think of those days, almost all I seem to remember is dreary, never-ending boredom. What about you?"

Fever and fatigue, and now these memories of the past, had given her a look of melancholy languor that went well with her melting eyes and the warm, exotic colour of her skin.

"Yes," she went on, noticing that Jacques merely knitted his brows without replying, "it's terrible being bored with life when one's a child. And then, when I was fourteen or fifteen, quite suddenly, it came to an end. I can't think why. Something changed inside me. Nowadays I've never got the blues. Even when" (she was thinking: "Even when you make me unhappy") "even when things go badly."

His hands thrust into his pockets, his eyes fixed on the carpet, Jacques kept silent. Such evocations of the past sent waves of fury racing through him. Nothing in his earlier life found favour in his eyes. Nowhere, at no stage of his career, had he felt at home, settled down for good in his vocation—as Antoine felt. Always, everywhere, a misfit. In Africa, and Italy, and Germany. At Lausanne, even, almost as much as elsewhere. And not merely homeless, but at bay— hounded down by society, by family and friends, by the very conditions of life, and also by something else, something he could not define, which seemed to come from within himself.

" 'Major Van der Cuyp …' " Gise began. She was lingering on these echoes of their childhood because she dared not breathe a word of the more recent memories haunting her mind. But she did not continue; she had learned her lesson: nothing now could fan those dead ashes into flame.

Silently watching Jacques, she tried in vain to solve the dark enigma. Why had he gone away, despite what had passed between them? Some vague remarks Antoine had let fall had disturbed her without explaining anything. What could have been the message the red roses sent from London were meant to convey?

Suddenly she thought: "How different he is from my 'Jacquot' of the past!"

With an emotion that now she could not hide she said aloud:

"How you've changed, Jacquot!"

From the evasive smile, the brief glance Jacques cast her, she guessed that her emotion had displeased him. With a quick change of tone and expression, she launched forth gaily into a description of her experiences in the English convent.

"It's so nice, the healthy, well-regulated life one leads. You simply can't imagine how fit one feels for work after gymnastics in the open air and a hearty English breakfast."

She did not say that, while she was in London, the one thing that had buoyed her up was the hope of finding him again. She did not tell him how that early-morning energy evaporated hour by hour, of the sombre moods that settled on her nightly in the dormitory bed.

"English life's so different from ours, and so fascinating." A commonplace, but to have hit on it was a relief, and to stave off the menace of another silence she kept to the theme. "In England everybody laughs, on purpose, on the least pretext. They simply won't hear of life being treated as 'a vale of tears.' So, you see, they think as little as possible; they play. They make a game of everything—beginning with life!"

Jacques listened to her chatter, without interrupting. He too would go to England. To Russia and America. He had all his future before him—for travelling, for seeking … He smiled approvingly, nodding assent now and then. Gise was no fool, and those three years seemed to have ripened her wits considerably. Made her prettier, too, and daintier. His eyes roved back over the counterpane to the slim, frail body which seemed, as it were, relaxed in its own warmth. And suddenly, crudely, it all came back—that gust of passion, their embrace under the great trees in the park. A chaste embrace; and yet even after all those years, after all he had gone through since, he still could feel that vibrant body swaying in his arms; under his mouth's kiss those inexperienced lips. And in a flash all thoughts of prudence, self-restraint, were dust before a fiery wind… . Why not? He went so far as to ask himself again, as in his maddest moments: "Why not marry her, make her mine?" But no sooner thought than he came up against some dark, dimly apprehended obstacle sundering him from her; somewhere in his inmost being lay an invincible impediment.

Then, as his gaze rested once more on the lithe, living form before him on the bed, his imagination, already rich with so many memories, cast across the screen the picture of another bed, and such another glimpse of slim, rounded flanks outlined under the bedclothes; and the desire that had just thrilled him melted into remembered pity. He saw again, laid out on her small iron bedstead,

that little prostitute at Reichenhall, a girl of seventeen, who had been so stubbornly resolved to die, that she had been discovered squatting on the floor, strangled by a noose tied to the cupboard lock. Jacques had been one of the first to enter the room; he still remembered the smell of sizzling fat that pervaded it, but, clearest of all, the flat, enigmatic face of the woman, still fairly young, who stood breaking eggs over a frying-pan in a corner of the room. A mark or two had loosened her tongue and she even gave some curious details. And on Jacques's asking her if she had known the dead girl well, she had exclaimed with a look of unforgettable sincerity: "*Ach, nein! Ich bin die Mutter*!"

Strange answer! "Oh, no! I'm her mother!" He was on the point of telling Gise the story, but thought better of it. To mention his life "over there" would open the door to questions.

Snug in her bed, with half-closed eyes, Gise was observing him hungrily. She was feeling desperate, on the brink of blurting out: "Speak to me, Jacques! What's become of you? What of me? Have you forgotten—everything?"

He was pacing the room, bringing his weight down on one foot then upon the other, in a brown study. Whenever his eyes met hers, he grew aware how hopelessly their minds worked at cross purposes, and at once feigned an extreme aloofness. There was not the faintest hint of his real feelings—how thrilled he was by her childish charm, and the innocence he glimpsed in her, as naive as the young throat shyly revealed between folds of filmy whiteness. He felt all the affection of an elder brother for this suffering little girl. But what a horde of impure memories kept forcing their unwelcome way between them! Bitterly he regretted feeling so old, so worn out … so soiled… .

"I guess you're awfully good at tennis now, aren't you?" he asked evasively; he had just noticed a racket on the top of the wardrobe.

Her moods changed quickly; now she could not repress a smile of childish triumph.

"You'll see for yourself!"

At once she felt dismayed. When would he see—and where? What a silly reply to make!

But Jacques did not seem to have noticed. His thoughts were far from Gise. The tennis-courts at Maisons-Lafhtte, a white dress… that brisk way she had of jumping off her bicycle at the club entrance. What was the meaning of the closed shutters of their flat in the Avenue de l'Observatoire? (For that afternoon when he had taken a stroll, uncertain where to go, he had walked oil to the Luxembourg Gardens, and down their street. The sun was just setting. He had walked rapidly, with his collar up. He always made haste to yield to a temptation, so as to be through with it the sooner. Then suddenly he had halted, looked up. All the windows were shuttered. Of course Antoine had told him Daniel was at Luneville, doing his military service. But what of *them*? It was not late enough to account for the closed shutters… . What did it matter anyhow? What could it matter? He had turned on his heel, and walked home by the shortest way.)

Perhaps she realized how far from her Jacques's thoughts had drifted. Unconsciously she stretched out an arm, as though to touch him, clasp him, draw him back.

"What a wind!" His voice was cheerful; he did not seem to have noticed her gesture. "Gise, doesn't it worry you, that rattle in your fireplace? Wait a bit!"

He went down on his knees and wedged an old newspaper between the loose iron slats of the fire-screen. Worn out by emotions, by thoughts she dared not utter, Gise watched him at work.

"That's better!" he exclaimed as he got up. Then he sighed and, for the first time, spoke without much weighing his words. "Yes, this fierce wind—how it makes one wish the winter was over, and spring returning!"

Obviously his mind was busy with the springtimes he had spent abroad. And she could guess what he was thinking: "Next May I'll be doing this, I'll be going there …"

"And in this coming spring," she mused, "what place does he allow for me?"

A clock had just struck.

"Why, it's nine!" Jacques said. His tone suggested it was time to go.

Gise, too, had heard the clock strike. "How many nights," she thought, "have I spent here, with this lamp beside me, waiting, hoping! Hearing that hour strike as it struck now—and Jacques far away, lost. Now he is here, beside me. He is with me tonight. Hearing, with me, the clock strike… ."

Jacques had come back to the bed.

"Well, well," he said, "it's high time I let you go to sleep."

"He is with me!" she was repeating to herself, her eyes half closed to watch him better. "And yet life, the outside world, everything round us is going on exactly as if nothing had happened, nothing changed." And she had an impression, bitter as remorse, that, truth to tell, she had not changed either—had not changed enough.

Not wishing to seem in too much haste to leave her, Jacques had remained standing at the bedside. Without the least flicker of emotion he lightly clasped the small brown hand lying on the counterpane. He could smell the odour of the cretonne curtains, mingled tonight with a faint acid tang, which he rather disliked so long as he attributed it to her fever, but cheerfully inhaled when he saw a sliced lemon in a saucer on the bedside table.

Gise did not move. Her eyes, wide open, were brimming with the bright tears that she was keeping back.

He made as if he noticed nothing.

"Good night, then! Tomorrow you'll be quite well."

"Quite well? Oh, I'm not so keen about it, really!" she sighed, with a wan smile.

She hardly knew why she had spoken thus. Her indifference about recovering expressed her lassitude, her lack of courage to face life again—and, most of all, her sadness for the ending of this long-awaited hour, so disappointing, yet so sweet. Tense with emotion, her lips would hardly move, but somehow she managed to cry gaily:

"Thank you for having come to see me, Jacquot."

Once more she was on the point of holding out her hand to him; but he had reached the door. Turning, he nodded to her cheerfully and went out.

She turned off the light and snuggled down between the sheets. Her heart was thudding violently. She crossed her arms, hugging her sorrow to her breast, as long ago she used to hug the "baby tiger." Mechanically she murmured: "Holy Virgin, my guide and sovereign Queen, into thy dear hands I commend my hopes and comforts, my griefs and sorrows… ." She prayed in fervent haste, trying to lull her brain to rest with the sing-song cadences. Never did she feel so happy as when she was praying, praying her heart out, in a limbo of no thought. Her arms were tightly locked upon her breast. Everything was growing vague, merging into an insubstantial dream-world, till presently it seemed to her that she was clasping to her heart's warmth a real baby, hers and hers alone; and, bending a little forward so as to enfold this phantom gift of love in a soft, safe nest, she strained him to her bosom, weeping over him, as she fell asleep.

# X

ANTOINE was waiting for his brother to leave Gise's room and come downstairs to bed; he proposed that night to sort out in a rough-and-ready way the personal papers left by M. Thibault, and he preferred to be alone when doing this. Not that he wished to keep Jacques in the dark with regard to any of his father's affairs, but on the day following the old man's death, when he was rummaging for the will, his eyes had chanced to fall on a sheet of paper headed "Jacques," and though he had then lacked time to give it more than a brief glance, he had seen enough to realize it would make painful reading for his brother. Very likely there were other documents of the same order; it was undesirable for Jacques to light on them—for the present, anyhow.

Before going to the study, Antoine crossed the dining-room to see what progress M. Chasle was making with his task. The table had all its extra leaves in, and on it were stacked some thousands of envelopes and the printed notices of M. Thibault's death to be sent out to friends and acquaintances. Instead of getting on with his job of addressing the envelopes, M. Chasle seemed absorbed in checking up the packets of notices which he was ripping open one after the other.

Puzzled by the sight, Antoine approached him.

"Ah, there's a lot of dishonest folk in the world," the old fellow grumbled, peering up at Antoine. "Each package ought to contain five hundred. Well, here's one with five hundred and three in it, and another with five hundred and one." As he spoke, he was tearing up the notices in excess of the round five hundred. "Of course, it's nothing very serious," he allowed indulgently, "but all the same, if we kept them, we'd soon be snowed under by these notices over and above …"

"Over and above … what?" Antoine was completely flabbergasted.

M. Chasle raised a monitory finger, with a little knowing cackle of laughter.

"Exactly. That's the point."

Antoine turned on his heel, leaving it at that. He was smiling to himself. "The oddest thing, is that when one talks to that old loon, one always gets the impression, for a moment, that one's even loonier than he!"

Once in the study, he turned on all the lights, drew the curtains, and closed the door.

M. Thibault's papers were arranged methodically. "Charities" had a cupboard to themselves. In the safe were a few stock certificates, but mostly old ledgers and documents relating to the administration of the Thibault property. As for the desk, the left-hand drawers contained deeds, contracts, and business papers; those on the right—the ones in which Antoine was interested just now—seemed reserved for personal and private matters. In one of them he had found the will and, under the same cover, the paper relative to Jacques.

He knew where he had replaced it. It turned out to be merely an excerpt from the Bible. Deuteronomy xxi, 18-21.

> If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother …
>
> Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;
>
> And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious …
>
> And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

The sheet was headed "Jacques," and underneath was written: "*Stubborn and rebellious.*"

Antoine read it with emotion. There were signs it had been written fairly recently. The verses had been carefully copied; each letter was neatly rounded off. The whole document seemed to breathe an atmosphere of moral certitude, of ripe reflection, and tenacity of purpose. And yet did not the very existence of this sheet of paper which the old man had (deliberately, Antoine felt quite sure) placed in the envelope that contained his will—did it not testify to certain qualms of conscience, a desire to justify himself?

Antoine picked up his father's will again. It was a huge affair, with numbered pages, divided into chapters, subdivided into clauses, like an official report, and boxed in boards. It was dated July 1912. So M. Thibault had made his will at the start of his illness, shortly before the operation. No reference was made to Jacques; the testator spoke throughout of "my son," "my heir," in the singular.

On the previous day Antoine had only glanced through the chapter headed "Instructions for the Obsequies." Now he studied it in detail.

> I desire that, after a low mass has been said at Saint Thomas Aquinas's Church, my remains shall be taken to Crouy. I desire that my obsequies shall be solemnized in the Chapel of the Institution in the presence of the assembled children. I desire that, unlike the funeral service at Saint Thomas Aquinas's Church, the ceremonies at Crouy shall be performed with all the dignity the Committee may deem fitting to accord my mortal remains. I wish to be carried to my last resting-place by representatives of the charitable societies which for many years have availed themselves of my wholehearted service; and also by a delegation from the Institute of France, whose reception of myself into their midst was the proudest moment of my life. Further, in view of my rank in the Order of the Legion of Honour, I desire, provided the regulations admit of it, that military honours may be accorded me by our army, whose cause I have defended my life long in all I have said and written, and by my vote as an elector. Lastly, I wish that those who may express a wish to say a few words of farewell beside my grave may be permitted to do so without hindrance.

> Let there be no mistake: in writing thus, I have no illusions as to the vanity of posthumous encomiums. I tremble at the thought that one day I shall stand before the Judgment Seat. But, after seeking heavenly guidance in prayer and meditation, I am led to believe that my true duty is to shun the counsels of an unprofitable humility, and to take steps that, when death befalls me, my light may, God willing, for the last time so shine before men that other Christians who belong to our great French middle class may be encouraged to devote themselves likewise to the service of the Faith and Catholic Charity.

A clause followed, headed: "Detailed Instructions." M. Thibault had gone to the trouble of arranging the whole ceremony step by step, and Antoine had no say in the matter. Up to the last moment the head of the family was exercising his authority; and, indeed, Antoine found a certain grandeur in the old man's determination to play his patriarchal part up to the very end.

M. Thibault had even drawn up the notice of his death for circulation to his friends, and Antoine had sent it on, as it stood, to the printer's. M. Thibault's numerous distinctions were set forth in an order that had evidently been meticulously worked out, and took up a full dozen lines of print. MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE was in capital letters. Following this came not only such descriptions as *Doctor of Laws* and *Sometime Member for the Lure Department*, but also *Honorary President of the Joint Committee of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paris, Founder and President of the Social Defence League, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Child Welfare Society, Sometime Treasurer of the French Branch of the United Catholic Defence League, President of the Church Council in the Parish of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Antoine could make little of certain descriptions, such as *Corresponding Member of the Brotherhood of Saint John Lateran*. The imposing catalogue concluded with a list of Orders, that of the Legion of Honour coming after the Orders of Saint Gregory and Saint Isabella, even after that of the Southern Cross. The insignia of all these Orders were to be pinned above the coffin.

The greater part of the will consisted of a long list of legacies to various charities and individuals, many of whom were unknown to Antoine.

Then his eye was caught by Gise's name. M. Thibault bequeathed, in the form of a dowry, a large sum of money to "Mile. Gisèle de Waize," whom he had "brought up and regarded almost as a daughter." She was charged to provide, from this sum, for "the declining years of her good aunt." Thus the girl's future was comfortably secured.

Antoine stopped reading for a moment, to savour the enjoyable surprise of finding the self-centred old man capable of such kindness, such open-handedness. He blushed with pleasure, and he felt a thrill of gratitude and respect, fully justified by what he learned from the succeeding pages. M. Thibault seemed to have spared no pains to ensure the welfare of those around him: his servants, the concierge, the gardener at Maisons-LafBtte—-not one was forgotten.

The last sheet dealt with various endowments, all of which were to. bear Oscar Thibault's name. Antoine dipped at random into the lengthy list. There was an "Oscar Thibault Bequest" to the French Academy: a prize for moral excellence. Naturally! Antoine smiled. An "Oscar Thibault Prize," to be awarded quinquennially by the Institute of Moral Science for the best literary work "serving to further the fight against prostitution, and to combat the tolerance that the present Government of the French Republic"—obviously! —"shows towards the social evil." Antoine smiled again. Gise's legacy inclined him to indulgence. Moreover, in this constantly expressed desire of the testator to promote the spiritual well-being of mankind, Antoine could discern—not without emotion'—an obscure craving, from which he himself, for all his maturity of mind, was not wholly immune: the craving to outlive his death in the temporal world.

The least foreseeable, most naive, of the bequests was the granting of a fairly large sum to the Bishop of Beauvais, for the annual publication of an *Oscar Thibault Annual*. As many copies as possible were to be printed, and sold at a low price at all the stationers' and bookshops in the diocese. Described as a "mine of daily information for gardeners and agriculturists," it was to include "an entertaining section of edifying stories for recreation on Sundays and winter evenings," and steps were to be taken to see it found its way into every Catholic home.

Antoine folded up the will. He was anxious to get on with his task. As he slipped the bulky document back into its case, he caught himself thinking, not without satisfaction: "If he could be so lavish in his bequests, it means he's leaving us a pretty handsome sum."

The first drawer contained a large leather portfolio, inscribed "Lucie," Mme. Thibault's given name.

As he undid the strap Antoine had a vague feeling of discomfort—-quite unjustified, he reminded himself.

Miscellaneous objects, to begin with. An embroidered handkerchief; a small box with a little girl's earrings in it; a white satin purse ribbed with ivory and containing a confession note folded in four, with some writing in ink that had become illegible. Some faded photographs that Antoine had never seen before showed his mother as a child, and in her teens. Antoine was surprised that a man so unsentimental as his father should have preserved these tender relics, especially in the drawer which stood nearest to his hand. His heart warmed towards the merry, winsome girl shown in the photographs, though as he scanned them he was thinking more of himself than of his mother. When Mme. Thibault died, at Jacques's birth, he had been nine. A serious-minded, stubborn, rather priggish little boy, with —he had to admit it—not much natural affection. Without lingering over these distasteful memories, he investigated the other pocket of the portfolio.

He found two bundles of letters of equal size labelled: "Lucie's Letters," "Oscar's Letters." The latter packet was tied with a silk ribbon, and inscribed in a sloping, school-girlish handwriting. Probably M. Thibault had piously preserved it exactly as he had found it, after his wife's death, in her escritoire.

Antoine hesitated about opening it; he could come back to it later. But it happened that the ribbon was loose and, as he pushed the packet away, his eye was caught by some phrases which stood out, words instinct with reality that called up from the shadows a past of which he had never dreamt, still less had a glimpse.

> I shall write to you again from Orleans, before the Congress opens. But, my darling, I want to tell you tonight that my heart beats for you alone, to beg you to have patience, and to try to help you through this first day of our week of separation. Happily Saturday is not so very far off. Good night, my love. Why not keep the baby with you in your room, so as not to feel so lonely?

Before continuing reading Antoine got up and locked the door.

> I love you with all my heart and soul, my best beloved. To be separated from you has for me a sharper sting than the bitter frosts of this foreign land. I shan't wait at Brussels for W. P. to come. Before next Sunday I shall press you in my arms again, my darling Lulu. No one can ever guess what our hearts know; no two people have ever loved as we two love each other… .

That his father should have penned such phrases was to Antoine so amazing that he could not bring himself to slip the ribbon round the packet and lay it aside. All the letters, however, had not the same fervour.

> Something you wrote in your last letter has, I must own, displeased me. I beg you, Lucie, do not take advantage of my absence to waste time practising the piano. Mark well my words; the sort of ecstasy that music induces is apt to have a pernicious effect on the temperaments of young persons; it accustoms them to idleness, to letting their imagination run away with them, and may even lure a woman from her proper duties.

Sometimes a note of actual bitterness crept in.

> You don't understand me, and I now realize that you have never understood me. You accuse me of egoism—me of all people, whose whole life is spent in serving others! Ask Abbé Noyel (if you dare to) what he has to say on that subject! You would thank God for, and be proud of, the life of self-abnegation that I lead, could you but grasp its inner meaning, the high moral purpose and spiritual fervour that inform it. Instead of that, you give way to sordid jealousy, and all you can think of is how best to hinder, for your own selfish ends, the claims of these philanthropic societies which so greatly need my guidance.

This, however, was an exception. Most of the letters were couched in a deeply affectionate tone.

> Not a line from you yesterday, not a line today. I want you so badly that
> I hunger for a letter from you each morning in the most absurd way; it's my daily ration, and when I wake and find it missing I have no heart for the day's work. Well, today I consoled myself by rereading that exquisite letter you sent on Thursday—breathing of true love, and purity, and noble feelings. Surely you, my dear one, are the guardian angel God has posted at my side. I am vexed with myself for not loving you as you deserve. True, you have never complained; but that, my love, I know is because you make it a rule not to complain. But how base of me it would be, were I to feign to ignore my shortcomings, and to hide from you my remorse!
> Our delegation has had a very fine reception here, and I have been given a flattering place in it. Yesterday there was a dinner for thirty, with toasts to us and all the rest of it. I gather that the speech I made in acknowledgment was much appreciated. But don't think that such success in public makes me forgetful; between sessions, all my thoughts are for you, my best beloved, and for our little one.

Antoine was greatly moved. His hands were trembling a little as he put the packet back in the drawer. M. Thibault had always referred to the "dear departed saint" with a special kind of sigh and a glance ceilingwards, when recalling some past incident in which his wife had been concerned. But this brief insight into an unsuspected period of his parents' younger days had told Antoine more about them than all the allusions made by his father over twenty years.

The second drawer likewise contained bundles of letters: "Letters from the Children," "Reformatory Boys." "The rest of his family," Antoine thought.

He was more at home with that phase of the past—but no less surprised. Who would have dreamed that M. Thibault thus preserved all Antoine's letters, and all Jacques's, even the few letters Gise had sent, and kept them in a special dossier, "Letters from the Children"?

On the top of the pile lay an undated, but very early note; a few words awkwardly pencilled by a little boy, whose hand his mother must have guided.

> My dear Papa,
> I kiss you lovingly and wish you many happy returns of the day.
>
> Antoine.

For a moment he lingered pensively over this ancient relic, then passed on.

The "reformatory" group of letters seemed comparatively dull.

> Honoured Sir,
> We are being transferred this evening to the lie de Ré. Before leaving the prison, I would like to express my gratitude for all your kindnesses …
>
> *To My Kind Benefactor*
>
> Sir,
> He who writes to you and signs this letter is one who has returned to the fold of honesty so I make bold to ask you for your kind testimonial and enclose a letter from my Father asking you kindly not to pay to much attention to the gramma. My two little girls pray every night for Fathers Godfather as they call your honored self… .
>
> Sir,

I have now been 26 days in custody and am at my wit's end because the investigating Magistrate has come to see me only once in all that time, in spite of the petition I submitted showing cause …

A stained sheet of paper, headed "Montravel Prison Camp, New Caledonia"—the ink was yellow with age—ended as follows:

… hoping always for better days, I beg to remain, honoured sir,
Most gratefully yours,
Convict No. 4843.

Antoine could not help feeling moved by these expressions of trust and gratitude, all these pathetic evocations of his father's helping hand.

"I must get Jacques to have a look at these letters," he said to himself.

At the bottom of the drawer was a little package without any inscription; it contained three amateur photographs, dog-eared at the corners. The largest showed a woman some thirty years of age, standing at the edge of a pine forest on a mountainside. Antoine held it near the lamp; the woman's face was totally unknown to him. In any case the style of dress—ribboned bonnet, muslin collaret, and leg-of-mutton sleeves—showed that the photograph must be a very old one. The second, a smaller picture, showed the same woman sitting bare-headed in a public square, or possibly the garden of a hotel; under the bench on which she sat a white poodle crouched sphinx-like. In the third the dog had been taken alone, perched on a table, its muzzle pointing upwards and a bow-knot of ribbon on its head. In the box was also an envelope containing the negative of the large photograph, the mountain scene. No name, no date. On a closer view, Antoine judged that, though her figure had not lost its slimness, the woman might be older than he had thought at first—forty, perhaps, or more. She gave an impression of warm vitality and, despite the gaily smiling lips, of thoughtfulness; Antoine, who found the face attractive, pored over it for a while, unable to bring himself to put the photograph back into the box. Most puzzling of all—or was it only autosuggestion?—he was getting less sure that he had never seen this woman before.

The third drawer, otherwise almost empty, contained an old ledger, which Antoine all but failed to open. It was bound in morocco leather stamped with M. Thibault's initials, and, as a matter of fact, had never been used as an account-book.

On the front end-paper Antoine read: "A Present from Lucie for the First Anniversary of Our Wedding. Feb. 12, 1880."

In the middle of the next page M. Thibault had inscribed, likewise in red ink:

NOTES
*for a*
**History of Parental Authority**
*from the Earliest to Modern Times.*

But this title had been struck out. Evidently the project had been dropped. "A quaint hobby, that," Antoine smiled to himself, "for a man who'd been married a year, and whose first child was yet unborn."

After skimming through some pages, his curiosity was whetted. Few were blank. The changes in the handwriting showed that the ledger had served as a note-book for many years. It was not, however, a diary, as Antoine had begun by thinking—and hoping—but a collection of quotations presumably jotted down in the course of reading.

Still, Antoine reflected, the choice of the quotations might well be enlightening, and he studied the first pages with an inquisitive eye.

Few things are more to be feared than making the least change in established order. (Plato.)

Buffon on the sage: Content with his lot, his one wish is to remain as he has always been, to go on living as he has lived; sufficient unto himself, he has small need of others.

Some of the excerpts were rather unexpected.

There are sour, bitter, and naturally churlish hearts which render likewise sour and bitter all that enters into them. (Saint Francis of Sales)

There is no soul in the world that cherishes more warmly, more tenderly and passionately than mine; nay, I even exceed somewhat in loving-kindness. (Saint Francis of Sales.)

Prayer may have been accorded man to permit him to utter a daily cry of love for which he need not blush.

The last aphorism was written in a fluent hand, and no source was given. Antoine assumed that his father was its author.

Thereafter, indeed, M. Thibault seemed to have got into the way of inserting the fruits of his own musings between his gleanings from the works of others. And, as Antoine turned the pages, he discovered, with keen satisfaction, that the commonplace-book seemed very soon to have diverted from its original usage and become almost entirely a record of its owner's personal meditations.

At the outset most of these apophthegms had a political or social trend. It looked as if M. Thibault had from time to time jotted down such general ideas as might come in handy for his public speeches. There were quite a number of those phrases opening as a query cast in the negative form— "Is it not obvious that …?" "Must there not be …?" and so forth—which had been so characteristic of the old man's thought and conversation.

The authority of the head of a business is amply justified by the efficiency that lies behind it. But is there not more in it than that? For industry to achieve its maximum output must there not be loyal co-operation among all those contributing to that output? And nowadays is not the management the only organization which can ensure that spirit of co-operation among the workers?

The proletariat is up in arms against the inequalities of life, and stigmatizes as "injustice" the marvellous variety ordained by God.

Do we not tend to forget nowadays that what a man is "worth," on the material plane, almost invariably determines also his worth as a good citizen?

Antoine skipped two or three years. Opinions on topics of general interest were gradually giving place, it seemed, to meditations of a more personal order.

Is not what gives the Christian his wonderful sense of security the fact that the Church of Christ is also a temporal power?

Antoine smiled. "These high-principled folk," he mused, "given zeal and courage, can be more dangerous than real scoundrels. They impress everyone—especially the better class of people, and they're so convinced they have the Truth (with a capital 'T') in their pockets that they stick at nothing to ensure the triumph of their principles. At nothing! Yes, I've seen Father at work; for the good of his party, for the success of one of his charities—well, there were times he did some rather curious things! Things he'd never have dreamed of doing for his own sake, to make money, or for his personal advancement."

His eyes roamed the pages, settling now and then upon a phrase.

Is there not a proper, nay, beneficent form of egoism—or, rather, a way of putting egoism to the service of virtuous ends: for example, using it to buttress our religious zeal, not to say our faith?

Some of the aphorisms might have struck a reader ignorant of M. Thibault's personality and life as positively cynical.

Charities. The grandeur and, above all, the inestimable social service rendered by our Catholic institutions (benevolent societies, the Saint Vincent de Paul Sisterhood, etc.) lies in the fact that the relief they distribute rarely finds its way to other than deserving folk, such as accept their lot; they run no risk of encouraging discontented, rebellious spirits who are always chafing at their humble station and prating of "social injustice" and their "rights."

True charity does not aim at the happiness of others. May God give us the strength to deal harshly by those whom it is our duty to save from themselves!

The same ideas seemed still to preoccupy him several months later.

One must be ruthless with oneself—to have the right to be severe with others.

Among the virtues unrecognized as such, should we not set in the first rank, considering the hard schooling it requires, what, in my prayers, I have so long called "case-hardening"?

In the midst of an otherwise blank page stood this injunction, peremptory as a trumpet-call:

We must compel respect by dint of virtue.

"Case-hardening!" Antoine mused. He was learning that his father had been not only rigid but—deliberately—case-hardened. Yet he would not shut his eyes to a certain sombre grandeur in such self-repression—even though it led to sheer inhumanity. He pictured it as almost a wilful deadening of every natural sentiment. Sometimes, indeed, it seemed that, being the man he was, the merit he had acquired at such cost made M. Thibault suffer.

Respect does not necessarily preclude friendship, but rarely, it would seem, invites it. To admire is not to love and, if virtue wins esteem, it does not open hearts.

A rankling regret, which led him so far as to write, a few pages later:

The just man has no friends; God compensates him with recipients of his benevolence.

Here and there, if rarely, a truly human note was struck—so out of tune with the rest that Antoine was dumbfounded.

If to do good does not come natural to us, let us do good out of despair—or, at least, so as to refrain from doing evil.

"There's something of Jacques in all that," Antoine murmured. But it was hard to lay a finger on it. There was the same emotional tension, the same harshness, the same dark ferment of the instincts. He even wondered if his father's aversion for Jacques's adventurous disposition had not been sometimes implemented by a secret similarity of temperament.

A good many of the aphorisms were headed: "*A Lure of the Tempter*."

*A Lure of the Tempter*: fetish-worship of the Truth. Sometimes is it not harder, and more courageous, to be loyal to oneself and persevere in a belief, even if it be undermined, than presumptuously to shake the pillars and risk bringing down the whole edifice?

Is not the cult of consistency higher than the cult of truth?

*A Lure of the Tempter*. To mask one's pride is not to be modest. It is far better to flaunt the failings one has not been able to overcome, and to convert them into energy, than to lie, and weaken oneself by hiding them.

"Pride," "modesty," and "vanity" were words that cropped up on each page.

> *A Lure of the Tempter*. Self-belittlement, speaking humbly of oneself— is not that a stratagem of Pride? The right course is to keep silent about oneself. But that is impossible for any man, unless he feels assured that others, anyhow, will speak well of him.

Antoine smiled once more, but with an irony that soon froze on his lips. What melancholy there was even in a commonplace like this, when written by the pen of M. Thibault:

> Are there any lives, even those of saints, in which falsehood does riot play a daily part?

Moreover—and this was far from fitting in with Antoine's impression of the last phase of his father's life—it seemed that, crusted though it was with certainties, the old man's peace of mind had steadily diminished with the years.

> The output of a man's career, the scope and value of his activities, are determined, more than one would fancy, by the natural affections. Some there are who have missed achieving a life's work worthy of their talents, for lack of a beloved presence at their side.

Occasionally there were intimations of a secret frailty of the flesh.

> Can a sin that has not been committed warp a man's character, and cause as much havoc in his spiritual life as an actual misdeed? Its effect is similar, and the sting of remorse as keen.
> *A Lure of the Tempter*. We must not confound with love of our neighbour the emotion that we sometimes experience at the sight of, or contact with …

The rest of the line had been struck out; but, holding the page up to the light, Antoine made out the missing words:

> … young people, even mere children.

There was a pencilled note in the margin: "July 2, July 25, August 6, August 8, August 9."
A few pages further on a new note was struck.

> O God, Thou knowest my unworthiness and my affliction. I have no right to Thy pardon, for I have not broken, I cannot break, with my sin. Fortify my resolve that I may shun the Tempter's lure.

> Antoine suddenly remembered certain obscene words which had escaped his father's lips when he was delirious, on two separate occasions. M. Thibault's self-examinings were interspersed with appeals to the Creator's mercy.

> O Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.
> Keep watch over me, O Lord, for if Thou leavest me alone I shall betray Thee.

Antoine turned some more pages. A date added in pencil in the margin, "August '95," caught his eye.

> A charming token of love. He had left his book lying on the table; his place marked with the wrapper of a newspaper. Who can have been up and about so early this morning? A cornflower, surely from that corsage she was wearing yesterday evening, now replaced the strip of paper.

August 1895. Completely baffled, Antoine searched his memory. In 1895 he had been fourteen. That year M. Thibault had taken the family to a place near Chamonix. Someone he had met at the hotel? His mind went back at once to the lady with the poodle. Perhaps the following pages might clear the matter up. No, there was not another word about the lady of the cornflowers.
Still, a little further on, he found a flat, dry, faded flower—the very flower, perhaps—between two pages, on one of which was a quotation from La Bruyère.

> She has the makings of a perfect friend; and, with it, something that might lead one beyond friendship.

In the same year, dated December 31, as if by way of conclusion, came an entry recalling M. Thibault's schooling with the Jesuits:

> *Saepe venit magno jcenore tardus amor.*

But vainly Antoine racked his brain for memories of the summer vacation of '95-—the leg-of-mutton sleeves and the white poodle… .
It was impossible to read the whole book at a sitting, and anyhow the entries gradually fell off during the last ten or twelve years. M. Thibault had become a leading light in the world of charities, and his duties in connexion with them left him little spare time. Except during the vacations he rarely wrote in the ledger, and excerpts from religious literature once more bulked large. Not a line had been written since Jacques's departure, or during the old man's illness.

One of the last entries, written in a less firm hand, conveyed a mood of disillusionment.

> When a man achieves distinction, he has already ceased to merit it. But may it not be that God in His mercy grants him this eminence in the world's esteem to enable him to bear the disesteem in which he holds himself, and which first poisons, then dries up, the well-springs of all happiness, nay, even of all charity?

The last pages of the book were blank.

At the end was a small pocket in the silk lining of the leather cover; it contained odds and ends: two amusing photographs of Gise as a small child, a calendar for 1902 in which the Sundays were nicked off, and a letter on mauve paper:

> April 7, 1906.
>
> Dear W.X. 99,
>
> I could echo word for word all you tell me about yourself. Yes, I cannot now conceive what prompted me to put such an advertisement in the paper, considering how I was brought up; and I am quite as shocked at my having done so as you can be at having studied the Matrimonial Column in your newspaper and yielded to the temptation of writing to a total stranger whose identity was concealed by two mysterious initials.
>
> For I, like you, am a fervent Catholic, and most attentive to my Religious Duties; indeed I have never neglected them even for a single day; in fact it's all so wonderfully romantic, don't you agree, that one would think a Sign had been given us, and God wished you and me to have that moment of weakness when I put in the advertisement, and you read it and cut it out. I should tell you that I have been seven years a widow and am feeling more and more the sadness of a loveless life; what makes it harder is that I have no children, and so that consolation is denied me. Still, it can't be always such a consolation, as you, who have two grown-up sons, in fact a real Home, and as far as I can make out a very strenuous business life, you too complain of loneliness and lovelessness. Yes, indeed, I agree that this urge for Love we feel must come from God, and in my prayers to Him morning and night I always ask it may be granted me to know once more the joys of having someone tender and true always at my side, joined in the bonds of Holy Wedlock. And to this man, sent me by Heaven, I too will bring a faithful, loving heart, and a youthfulness of the emotions, which surely is a Pledge of Happiness. But though I hate to think I may be giving you pain, I can't send you what you ask, though I quite understand your desire. You do not know the kind of woman I am, or who my dear Parents were, now dead but always living for me in my prayers—or my place in Society. Once more I beg you not to judge me by that momentary weakness when I put that notice in the paper, and please understand that, feeling as I do, I can't bring myself to send you a photo, even a flattering one. But what I will gladly do is to ask my Confessor, who since last Christmas has been Senior Curate in one of the Paris parishes, to get in touch with the Abbé V. of whom you spoke in your second letter; my Confessor will give all the information required. As for my personal appearance —I might go myself and call on the Abbé V., in whom you have confidence; he will then be able …

The fourth page ended with these words. Antoine hunted for the next one in the silk flap; it was not there.

He could not doubt the letter had been meant for his father; the references to the "Abbé V." and the two sons proved it. Should he tackle the Abbé Vécard? But the priest, even if he had played a part in this matrimonial project, would certainly refuse to speak about it.

Could it be the lady with the poodle? Antoine wondered. No, this letter was dated 1906—not very long ago. The year when he had been working under Philip at the hospital, and Jacques was in the reformatory. The bonnet, wasp-waist, and leg-of-mutton sleeves wouldn't fit in with any date so recent as 1906. Well, there was no finding out now; he would never know the truth.

He put back the ledger, locked the drawer, and looked at the clock; half-past midnight. He rose from his seat. "The rags and tatters of a man's life!" he murmured. "And yet what a full life it was, a life like Father's! There's always far more to a human life than anyone imagines."

As if to wrest a secret from it, he stared for some moments at the leather-upholstered mahogany chair from which he had just risen, the chair in which, over so many years, solidly planted and leaning a little forward, M. Thibault, turn by turn ironical or cutting or portentous, had pronounced his dooms.

"What did I really know of him?" he mused. "Only one side of him, the patriarchal side—the authority which by divine right he exercised over me, over us all, for thirty years; but I must say this for him, always conscientiously. Stern and ruthless, but always just according to his lights; devoted to us, as to his duties. And, of course, I knew him too as the social despot all looked up to and feared. But the real man, the man he was in solitude, communing with himself, what was that man? I haven't a notion. Never once did he drop the mask and utter in my presence a thought or sentiment in which I could detect anything genuinely personal, anything which came from deep down in his heart."

Now that Antoine had dipped into these papers, lifted a corner of the veil, and had a glimpse into his father's privacy, he realized with a thrill that was almost pain that, for all the pomp and circumstance, the man now in his coffin had been a man like others, and pitiable perhaps as they; and of this man who was his father, he, Antoine, had known absolutely nothing.

And suddenly he asked himself: "And what did he know of me? Still less. Less than nothing! A schoolmate who had lost sight of me for fifteen years would know more about me. Was that his fault? Wasn't it, rather, mine? Here was a well-read old man whom many eminent people regarded as shrewd and levelheaded, one whose advice was well worth taking—and I, his son, never asked him his opinion except as a matter of form, after I'd consulted others and already made up my mind. Surely, when we were alone together, two men like us, of the same blood and the same type of character, might have exchanged ideas—and yet between us, father and son, there was no common language, no possibility of communication; we were strangers."

He took a few steps up and down the room. "Yet—no!" he murmured. "I'm wrong. We weren't strangers to each other. That's the terrible thing. There was a bond between us, a very real one—the bond that links father with son and son with father—absurd though it seems, considering our relations with each other, to think of such a thing. That unique, instinctive sense of kinship—it existed, sure enough, deep down in our hearts, in his and in mine. In fact that's why I'm feeling so bowled oyer just now; for the first time since I

was born I've had a glimpse of something that lay behind our lifelong estrangement, something I never could have guessed—a possibility, a quite exceptional possibility, of mutual understanding. And I'm now convinced that despite appearances, and though there was never the least glimmer of an entente between us, there has not been and there will never be in the whole world another person—not even Jacques—so well fitted to be understood by me as to the real man he was under the surface, or so well qualified to penetrate, almost at a glance, the secret places of my personality. Because he was my father, because I am his son!"

He was standing by the study door. His fingers settled on the key. "High time to go to bed." But before switching off the light, he turned about and gazed again at the familiar room, once tenanted by a busy mind, and empty now as an abandoned shell.

"Too late," he thought. "There's nothing to be done—for ever."

Light was filtering beneath the dining-room door.

Antoine threw it open. "Hurry up, M. Chasle! It's time for you to be going."

His bowed head flanked by two tall piles of announcements, M. Chasle was addressing envelopes.

"Ah, so it's you. Glad you've come. Have you a minute to spare?" he mumbled, without looking up.

Supposing that the little man needed his help for an address, Antoine went up to him unsuspectingly.

"Only a minute," M. Chasle repeated, still writing. "Eh? Yes, I'd like to make quite clear what I was saying just now, about that little nest-egg."

Without waiting for a reply, he laid down his pen, whisked out his false teeth, and began staring at Antoine with a disarming twinkle in his eye.

"Don't you want to go to bed, M. Chasle?"

"Oh, no! My mind's too busy with ideas for that." He perked his little bird-like head and shoulders towards Antoine. "I'm writing addresses, yes, but all the time, M. Antoine"—he chuckled with the knowing smile of a conjurer who is about to explain one of his tricks —"my brain is teeming, fairly buzzing with ideas, *ad lib*."

Before Antoine could create a diversion, he went on.

"Well, with that little nest-egg you spoke to me about, M. Antoine, I'll be able to bring off one of my ideas. Yes, one of my pet ideas. The 'Mart.' That's the name I'd thought of—a clever little name, eh? A sort of office, you see. Well, a shop, really. Yes, a shop to start with. In a busy street somewhere hereabouts. But the shop, that's only what meets the eye; there's the idea behind it… ."

When, as now, M. Chasle took his theme to heart, he spoke breathlessly, in little spasmodic sentences, his body swaying like a pendulum, his fingers spread and interlocked. The breathing-space after each phrase enabled him to muster ideas for the next remark; once that was ready, it was as if a trigger had been pulled, shooting his shoulders forward and the words out simultaneously. Then he would pause again, as if incapable of secreting more than a thimbleful of thought at one time.

Antoine wondered if M. Chasle's wits were not even more addled than usual, after the alarms of the past few days and several sleepless nights.

"Latoche would explain all that much better than I can," the little man went on. "I've known him for quite a while now, and from what I hear of his past, he has a very good record, has Latoche. A master mind. Bursting with ideas. Like mine. And he shares the credit, you know, of that great idea I mentioned, the 'Mart.' The Mart of Modern Discoveries. Do you see what I mean?"

"Well—I can't say I do."

"It's like this. There's a lot of little inventions nowadays, useful in the home—gadgets, as they call them. And lots of small inventors who think up something and don't know how to handle it. Well, we shall make a sort of clearing-house, Latoche and I. We'll put advertisements in the local papers."

"What locality?"

M. Chasle stared at Antoine as if he did not understand the question. After a pause he went on.

"In the lifetime of the deceased, I'd have blushed for very shame to talk about such things. But now it's different. I've been turning it over in my mind for thirteen years, M. Antoine. Ever since the Exposition. What's more, I've thought up, all on my own, some A-r little gadgets. Oh, yes, indeed! A patent heel that records the steps you take. An automatic, ever-ready stamp-moistener," Jumping down from his chair, he went up to Antoine. "But my masterpiece, if I may say so, is an egg. The square egg. The trouble's in discovering the right solution, but I'm in touch with researchers about that. The country priests, I've great hopes about them; on winter evenings, after the Angelus, they've heaps of time on their hands for tinkering with inventions, haven't they? I've set them all off on the track of my solution. But that's child's play, hitting on the solution. The idea-^ that was the difficult thing to hit on."

Antoine gazed at him open-eyed.

"And when you've got your solution …?"

"Why, then I steep the eggs in it, just long enough to soften the shell without spoiling the egg. You see what I mean?"

"No."

"Then I put them to set in moulds."

"Square moulds?"

"Naturally."

M. Chasle was squirming like a sliced worm; Antoine had never seen him in such a state.

"Hundreds, thousands at once. A square-egg factory. No more egg-cups. My egg stands four-square on its base! And the shells come in handy in the home. For match-boxes, or mustard-pots. Square eggs can be packed side by side in ordinary boxes; no more trouble about shipment, don't you see?"

He began climbing back on his office stool, but jumped away at once, as if he had been stung. His cheeks were crimson.

"Excuse me, sir, I'll be back in a moment. Bladder trouble. Nerves, you know. Once I get talking of my egg …!"

# XI

ON THE next day, a Sunday, Gise woke to find her temperature definitely back to normal; her limbs no longer ached, and she now felt resolute, eager to be up and doing. She was, however, still too weak to go to church, and spent the morning in her room in prayer and meditation. It was annoying to find she could not come to any satisfactory conclusion as to the changes Jacques's return might bring about in her life. She had nothing clear to go on; daylight filled the room, she was alone, and still she racked her brain in vain to find some adequate reason for the aftertaste of disappointment, almost of despair, Jacques's visit on the previous evening had left behind it. Yes, they must have an explanation, do away with every misunderstanding. Then, all would become plain.

But the morning passed and Jacques did not appear. Even Antoine had not shown up since the body had been placed in its coffin. Aunt and niece had a solitary lunch, after which the girl retired to her bedroom.

The hours crept slowly through an afternoon of bleak, soul-deadening gloom. At a loose end, tormented by thoughts she was unable to shake off, Gise felt the strain on her nerves becoming so unbearable that at four o'clock, while her aunt was still in church, she slipped on a coat, ran downstairs to the ground-floor flat, and asked Léon to show her into Jacques's room.

He was sitting at the window, reading a newspaper.

Clean-cut against the grey light of the street, the outline of his head and shoulders showed in profile; Gise was struck by his robustness. Once he was no longer near her, she forgot the man he had become and could recall only her "Jacquot," the boy with the almost childish features, who had strained her to his breast under the trees at Maisons three years before.

At her first glance she noticed, though she did not pause to analyse her impressions, the way he was sitting, uncomfortably perched on the corner of a light chair, and the general untidiness of the room— a suitcase gaping on the floor, a hat hung on the unwound clock, the unused desk, two pairs of shoes sprawling beside the bookcase—it all suggested a casual halting-place, a bivouac where there is no point in acquiring habits before the traveller moves on.

Rising, Jacques moved towards her. When she felt the blue sheen of his eyes, in which she caught' a flicker of surprise, hovering like a caress upon her face, she grew so flustered that the reasons she had planned to give in accounting for this visit passed clean out of her mind. Only the real reason—her passionate desire to clear things up —persisted. Casting discretion to the winds, pale, determined, she halted in the middle of the room.

"Jacques, we've got to have a talk, you and I."

In the gaze lingering on her with an affectionate insistence she glimpsed a sudden steely flash, veiled almost at once by a flutter of the eyelids.

Jacques laughed. "Good heavens, how serious that sounds!" His voice was a little shrill.

The jesting tone chilled her, but she contrived to smile, a small, woebegone smile that ended in a wince of pain. Her eves were brimming with tears. Looking away, she took a few steps to the side and sat down on the sofa-bed. The tears were rolling down her cheeks now and, as she dabbed them with her handkerchief, she murmured in a reproachful tone to which she tried to lend a certain playfulness:

"Look, you've made me cry—already! It's silly of me."

Jacques felt a rush of hatred stirring within him. Thus he had always been; even in childhood there had always smouldered deep in his heart a secret fire of anger—like the molten core, he pictured it, that seethes in the bowels of the earth—and now and again from that fiery underworld of rancour there would surge a jet of red-hot lava that nothing could hold back.

"Very well! Have it your own way!" he shouted furiously. "Say what you have to say. Yes, I too would rather get it over!"

She was so unprepared for such brutality, and the question she had meant to put was so completely answered by his outburst, that she sank back onto the cushions, with parted, quivering lips, as if he had actually struck her. With a weak gesture of self-defence she held her hand before her face, murmuring: "Oh, Jacquot!" in so heartbroken a voice that Jacques swung round at once.

Dazed, forgetting in a flash all he had been feeling, he made an abrupt transition from the cruellest malevolence to a sudden, impulsive, yet self-deceptive mood of tenderness. Running to the sofa, he seated himself at Gise's side, and strained the sob-racked body to his breast, murmuring in a broken voice: "Poor little girl! My poor little Gise!" Close under his eyes he saw the velvety texture of her skin; the dark, translucent rings round the tear-stained eyes made them seem sadder, gentler still. But suddenly, overwhelmingly, keener indeed than ever, his lucidity returned and even as he bent above her, breathing in the fragrance of her hair, he perceived as clearly as if he were looking at a stranger, the pitfalls of this purely physical attraction.

Thus far—and no further! Once already, on the treacherous descent of pity, he had saved them both from disaster by putting on the brakes in time—and leaving home. And, now he came to think of it, did not the mere fact that at such a moment he could take so detached a view, so clearly see the miserable risks they ran—did this not prove the superficiality of his feelings for her? And, also, did it not expose the hollowness of the self-deception which might play havoc with their lives?

No great heroism was needed on his part to fight down his emotion and resist the brief temptation to kiss the forehead that his lips were brushing. He contented himself with pressing affectionately to his shoulder, and gently stroking with his fingertips, the warm, silken cheek still moist with tears.

With a wildly thudding heart Gise nestled in his arms, eagerly proffering her cheek and neck to his caress. She made no movement, but she was on the brink of letting herself sink to the floor, clasping Jacques's knees in humble ecstasy.

But he was conscious of his pulses steadily slowing down to normal as he regained an equanimity that almost shocked him. For a moment he actually felt annoyed with Gise for rousing in him such sordid, commonplace lust, and even despised her a little for it. Suddenly like a blaze of lightning, dazzling and dying down at once, the picture of Jenny flashed across his mind, jarring it into renewed activity. Then, with another breathless shift of mood, he began feeling ashamed of himself. How far, far better was Gise than he! That staunch devotion, like a steady flame, which after three years' absence still burned bright as ever; that reckless self-

abandonment to the dictates of her love, to the tragic destiny which she accepted, cost what it might, unflinchingly—these assuredly were stronger and purer emotions than any he could muster… . And now he found he could review it all with a sort of detachment, a frozen calm enabling him at last, without the slightest risk, to lavish tenderness on Gise.

While his mind drifted thus from thought to thought, Gise was stubbornly intent on one thing, and one only. Set wholly on her love, her mind was so keyed up, so sensitive to everything that emanated from him, that suddenly, though Jacques had not said a word, and though he was still caressing the little cheek that nestled against his hand, she *knew*. If only by the casual, vaguely affectionate way his fingers strayed from her lips to her forehead and back again, intuitively she had guessed all—that the link between them was snapped for ever, that for him she … did not count!

Desperately, like one who verifies something proved to the hilt "just to make sure," finally, indubitably—she slipped abruptly' from his arms and gazed into his eyes. Taken unawares, he had no time to veil their hardness; and now everything was clear to her, clear beyond question. All was over, irremediably.

None the less, she felt a childish dread of hearing it said aloud. The truth was horrible enough; that it should crystallize into cruel words, words they would be fated never to forget, was more than she could bear. She summoned up what little strength remained to her, so that Jacques should not suspect the havoc of her hopes. She even found the courage to move further away from him, to smile, to murmur with a weak little flutter of her hand:

"What an age it is since I last came to this room!"

Actually she had a clear memory of the last time she had sat where she was now, on the sofa—beside Antoine. That day she had fancied she knew what sorrow was; had thought that Jacques's absence and her heart-racking anxiety about him were trials hardly to be borne. Yet what were they compared with what she now must bear? In those days all that was needed was for her to close her eyes—and there was Jacques, responsive to her call, exactly as her heart would have him be. And now—now, when he had come back, she was learning for the first time what it really meant to have to live without him. "How is it possible?" she asked herself. "How can this have happened?" And her anguish grew so urgent that she had to keep her eyes closed for some moments.

Jacques had got up, to turn on the light. After going to the window to draw the curtains, he did not come back to the sofa.

"Sure you haven't caught cold here?" he asked, noticing that she was shivering.

"Well, it isn't very warm in this room." She snatched at the pretext. "I think I'd better go upstairs."

The sound of their voices, breaking the silence, roused her a little and steadied her nerves.

The staying power she got from the pretence of easy conversation was precarious, yet her need to keep the truth at bay was so pressing that she went on talking by fits and starts, throwing out phrases as the cuttlefish projects its ink-cloud. And Jacques played up to her pretence, with an approving smile, secretly pleased, perhaps, that tonight again he could evade an explanation.

With an effort she had risen, and they stood gazing at each other. They were of almost the same height. "Never, never will I be able to live without him," she was thinking. That was a way to avoid confronting another thought, the cruellest of all: "*He* is so strong; how easily he can live without me!" Then suddenly it dawned on her that Jacques, with the callous unconcern of a man, was choosing the way of life he wanted, whereas she, she had no power to choose, or to give the least deflection to her own course.

She blurted out a question, trying to adopt a casual tone:

"When are you going away again?"

He kept hold on himself, took a few paces absent-mindedly, then half turned towards her.

"How about you—when are *you* going?"

How could he have made it clearer that he intended to leave, and assumed that Gise, too, would not be staying in France?

With a faint shrug of her shoulders, for the last time she forced a weak smile to her lips—she was becoming quite adept at it!—then opened the door and walked out.

He made no effort to keep her, but as his eyes followed her receding form, they had a sudden gleam of pure affection. If only, without risk, he could have taken her into his arms, and shielded her! Against what? Against herself, against himself. Against the pain he was causing her (though he was only vaguely aware of it), and the pain he was yet to bring upon her—that he could not do otherwise than bring on her.

His hands thrust in his pockets, his feet planted well apart, he remained standing in the centre of the untidy room. Flaunting its motley labels, the suitcase gaped up at him, and he pictured himself back at Ancona, or perhaps Trieste, in the dimly lit steerage of a mail-steamer, jostled by emigrants cursing one another in unfamiliar tongues. Then an infernal din broke out at the bows, the sound of metal rasping upon metal drowned the angry voices; the anchor was coming up. The swaying increased and everywhere there was a sudden hush, as the ship began to forge ahead into the black night.

Jacques felt his breast heave; that almost morbid craving for some undetermined struggle, some gesture of creation and fulfillment of his being, was balked by everything about him: this house, the dead man upstairs, Gise—all the past with its snares and shackles.

His jaws clenched stubbornly. "I must get away from all this," he muttered. "I must clear out."

Entering the elevator, Gise sank onto the seat. She wondered if she would have the strength to reach her room.

Yes, all was over now; that explanation on which, in spite of all, she had set such hope, had been attained, accomplished. "Jacques, we've got to have a talk," and his retort, "Yes, I too would rather get it over." Then the two questions, both unanswered: "When are you going away again?" and: "How about you?" Four little phrases, echoing in her baffled brain … and now … what was she to do?

As she re-entered the huge, silent flat where in the background two nuns kept vigil at a bier, where nothing now was left of the fond dreams she had been dreaming in it half an hour before, a spasm of such distress shot through her heart that the dread of being alone proved more insistent even than her weakness and desire for rest. Instead of hastening to her own room, she entered her aunt's.

Mademoiselle had returned and was sitting at her usual place, in front of her desk littered with bills and samples, pamphlets and medicine-bottles. Recognizing Gise's footstep, she turned stiffly round.

"Ah, there you are? As a matter of fact …"

Gise stumbled towards her, kissed the ivory-yellow forehead between the snowy braids and, too big now to shelter in the little old lady's arms, dropped at her knees, like a disconsolate child.

"As a matter of fact, Gise, I meant to ask you: haven't they told you anything about the house-cleaning, disinfecting the flat, you know? No? But there's a law on the subject. Yes, ask Clotilde. I wish you'd speak to Antoine about it. The first thing is to call in the

Health Department. Then, to make quite sure, we'll get some fumigator from the druggist's. Clotilde knows how; you have to stop up the doors and windows. You must give us a hand that day."

"But, Auntie," Gise murmured, her eyes filling again with tears, "I'll have to be going back. They're expecting me—over there."

"Over there? After what's happened? You're going to leave me by myself?" The words came out in jerks, timed to the spasmodic shaking of her head. "Can't you see the state I'm in? I'm seventy-five, Gise."

Yes, Gise was thinking, I shall go away. Jacques too. All will be as it was before—but with no hope left. Without a single ray of hope… . Her temples were throbbing, her thoughts in turmoil. Jacques had become incomprehensible to her; and it was the keenest pang of all that he, whom she had thought she understood so well all the time he was away, should now be a sealed book to her. How had it come about?

What should she do? she wondered. Enter a convent? There she would have peace, the rest that Jesus gives the heavy-laden. But first she must renounce the world. Could she make that great renunciation?

Giving way at last, she burst into tears and, drawing herself up, clasped her aunt tightly in her arms.

"Oh, it isn't fair," she sobbed. "It's not fair, Auntie—all that!"

Alarmed and somewhat vexed, Mademoiselle began to remonstrate. "What isn't fair? I don't follow… . What on earth are you talking about, Gise?"

Gise sank back to the floor, helplessly. Now and again, groping for some support, a friendly presence, she rubbed her cheek on the rough fabric under which jutted the sharp knees of Mademoiselle, whose voice went droning on indignantly, while the old head wagged this way and that.

"Imagine being left alone at seventy-five! Really, considering the state I'm in …!"

# XII

THE little chapel at the Crouy reformatory was full to overflowing. Raw though the weather was, the doors stood wide open, and in the courtyard, where the snow had been trampled by the crowd into a morass of slime, the two hundred and eighty-six young inmates stood, bare-headed and unmoving, in serried files. The brass badges on their belts gleamed above their brand-new dungarees, and round them were stationed the guards in full uniform with revolver-holsters dangling at their hips.

The mass had been said by the Abbé Vécard; but the Bishop of Beauvais, who had a sepulchral bass voice, was in attendance to pronounce the final intercession.

The responses floated up and hovered for a moment in the throbbing silence of the little nave.

*"Pater noster …"*

*"Requiem ceternam dona e'l, Domine."*

*"Requiescat in pace."*

*"Amen."*

Then the instrumental sextet posted on the dais struck up the closing voluntary.

From the start Antoine had been following the ceremony with keen interest. "It's odd," he thought, "the mania they have for playing Chopin's 'Funeral March' on these occasions; there's very little that's funereal about it. The sadness doesn't last; at once it strays off into a mood of joy—that craving for illusion, I suppose. Like the way consumptives have of thinking about their death light-heartedly." He remembered the last days of a young fellow named Derny—a composer, too—whom he had seen at the hospital. "Most people sentimentalize it; they fancy they're watching the ecstasy of a dying man who sees heaven opening to him. We, of course, know better; it's just a characteristic of the disease, almost a symptom of the lesions— like the high temperature."

In any case he had to admit that a mood of tragic grief would have been out of keeping with the present funeral, which was invested with the utmost pomp and circumstance procurable. He was—with the exception of M. Chasle, who, the moment he arrived, had slipped away into the crowd—the only member of the household present. Having attended the service in Paris, the cousins and distant relatives did not deem it necessary to make the pilgrimage to Crouy in such glacial weather. The congregation consisted exclusively of the dead man's colleagues, and delegates from benevolent societies. "Deputies," Antoine smiled, "like me; I'm deputizing for the family." And he added to himself, with a touch of melancholy: "Not a single friend." What he meant was: "No one who's a personal friend of *mine*. And for a very good reason." Since his father's death he had come to realize that he had no personal friends. With the possible exception of Daniel, he had had only colleagues or companions. It was his own fault; he had lived so long without a thought for others. Indeed, till quite recently he had been inclined to pride himself on his detachment. Now, he discovered, it was beginning to pall on him.

He watched with interest the movements of the officiating priests. "What next?" he wondered when he saw them retreat into the sacristy.

They were waiting for the undertaker's men to shift the bier onto the catafalque erected at the entrance to the chapel. Then once more the master of ceremonies came and bowed to Antoine with the prim elegance of a rather jaded ballet-master, ringing on the flags his ebony wand. The cortege formed again, moved down the aisle, and halted in the chapel porch, to listen to the speeches. Dignified, holding himself erect, Antoine complied with the requirements of the ceremonial willingly enough; his consciousness of being the focus of many eyes stimulated him to play his part. The mourners massed on either side strained forward to see, following Oscar Thibault's son, the Subprefect, the Mayor of Compiègne, the Crouy Town Council in full force and frock-coats, a young bishop *in partibus* "deputizing" for His Grace the Archbishop of Paris, and, amongst other eminent figures whose names were whispered round, some members of the Institute who had come unofficially to render homage to their dead colleague.

A powerful voice subdued the whispers of the crowd:

"Gentlemen, in the name of the Institute of France, I have the melancholy honour …"

The orator was Loudun-Costard, the jurist, a fat, bald-headed man, in a tight-fitting fur-lined coat with a fur collar. On him devolved the duty of sketching the dead man's career.

"With unflagging zeal he pursued his studies at Rouen College, near his father's factory… ."

Antoine remembered the photograph of a schoolboy, his arm resting on a pile of prizes. "So that was Father's boyhood," he mused. "Who on earth could have foreseen then …? No, one never gets to understand a man till he is dead. While he's alive, the sum of the things he still may do is a wholly unknown factor, and it throws out every estimate. At last death comes and fixes every aspect once for all; it's as if the real man came clear at last of the vague cloud of might-have-beens. You can see him in the round, take a back view, form a general opinion. That, by the way, is what I've always said," he added, with an inward smile; "you can never make an absolutely 'certain diagnosis till you have your patient on the post-mortem table."

He was well aware that he had not yet done with musing on his father's life and character; and that, for a long while yet, he was to derive from such musings interesting and instructive sidelights on his own psychology.

"When he was invited to bear a part in the labours of our eminent fraternity, it was not only his loftiness of purpose, his philanthropic zeal, and his vast energy that we invoked; nor was it only that fine, unswerving probity, which made him an outstanding figure of our generation …"

"Yet another 'deputy,' " Antoine smiled to himself, as he listened to the flood of eulogy. But he was not insensitive to it; indeed he felt inclined to think that he had habitually underrated his father's true worth.

"… and, gentlemen, let us bow our heads in homage to that noble heart, which to its last beat throbbed ever and alone for just and generous causes."

The "immortal" had finished. He folded his sheaf of notes, hastily thrust his hands back into the fur-lined pockets, and modestly retreated to his place amongst his fellow-delegates.

"The President of the Joint Committee of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paris," the ballet-master announced in a discreet voice.

A venerable old man, armed with an ear-trumpet and supported by a footman nearly as ancient and infirm as his master, tottered up to the catafalque. The sole survivor of a group of young men from Rouen who had come in the same year as M. Thibault to study law in Paris, not only was he the dead man's successor to the presidency of the charity organization, but he had been his lifelong friend. He was stone-deaf and had been thus afflicted for very many years; indeed since earliest childhood Antoine and Jacques had always referred to him as "Old Door-Nail."

"Gentlemen, in the feelings which unite us here today, there should be something more than grief for our great loss," the old man piped. The high-pitched, quavering voice brought back to Antoine's memory Old Door-Nail's visit, two days previously, to the death-chamber. Then, too, he had tottered forward on the same servant's feeble arm. "Orestes," he had squeaked, on entering the room, "wishes to give Pylades a last token of his friendship." He had been led up to the corpse and his bleary, red-rimmed eyes had pored over it for a long while; then, straightening up, he had gulped down a sob and yelled at Antoine as if they had been thirty yards apart: "Ah, if you only knew what a handsome lad he was, at twenty!" At the time Antoine had been genuinely moved by the old man's remark. "How quickly one's mood changes!" he thought. Recalling it today, he felt merely amused.

"What was the secret of his forcefulness?" the old man declaimed. "To what did Oscar Thibault owe his unfailingly well-balanced judgment, his unruffled optimism, that self-confidence of his which made child's play of every obstacle and assured his triumph in the most arduous undertakings? … Is it not, gentlemen, one of the undying glories of the Catholic faith that it gives the world such men as he was and such lives as his?"

"The old man's right," Antoine had to admit to himself. "His faith was a tremendous asset for Father. Thanks to it he never knew what it can mean to be held up by scruples or an exaggerated sense of responsibility, or mistrust of oneself, and all the rest of it. A man with faith can always drive straight ahead." He even fell to wondering if people like his father and Old Door-Nail had not chosen, when all was said and done, one of the securest paths a man may follow from the cradle to the grave. "From the social point of view," Antoine reflected, "they are amongst the few who best succeed in reconciling their lives as individuals with the life of the community. I suppose they are obeying a human species of the instinct that brings about the anthill and the hive. And that is no small thing. Even those characteristics which I found so detestable in my father—his pride, his thirst for honours, his love of playing the despot—it's thanks to them, I must admit, that he got far more out of himself, as a social value, than if he'd been humble, easy-going, and considerate… ."

"Gentlemen, for this glorious fighter in the good cause our tributes are superfluous today." The old man's voice was growing hoarse. "Never have the times been so critical. Let us not linger burying our dead, but let us replenish our strength at the same holy fountainhead, and waste no time… ." Carried away by the sincerity of his emotion, he tried to take a step forward, swayed, and had to clutch his servant's wavering arm. But this did not prevent him from ending his speech with a shrill: "Let us waste no time, gentlemen, in returning to our posts, to fight the good fight side by side!"

"The Chairman of the Child Welfare Society," announced the ballet-master.

The little man with the small white beard who now moved uncomfortably forward seemed literally frozen to the marrow. His teeth were chattering, his face was blue with cold. He cut a pathetic figure, congealed and wizened by the glacial air.

"I am gripped—am gripped"—he seemed to be making superhuman efforts to part his frost-bound lips—"by a profound and melancholy emotion."

"Those children there will catch their death of cold," Antoine grumbled to himself. He was getting impatient; he too felt the cold creeping up his limbs, and his stiff shirt-front like a slab of ice under his overcoat.

"He went his way among us doing good. Well might that be his glorious epitaph: *Pertransiit benefaciendo*.

"He leaves us, gentlemen, laden with tokens of our high esteem."

"Esteem!" Antoine reflected. "He's said it! But whose esteem?" He reviewed with an indulgent eye the phalanx of old gentlemen—all decrepit, shivering in their shoes, eyes watering with the cold, each putting his best ear forward to hear the speaker and greeting every panegyric with demonstrations of approval. Not one of them but was thinking of his own funeral, envious of these "tokens of esteem" which they were lavishing today so copiously on their late lamented colleague.

The little man with the beard was short-winded; very soon he made way for his successor.

The new speaker was a handsome old man with pale, remote, steely eyes; a retired vice-admiral, who had taken to philanthropy. His exordium roused Antoine's dissent.

"Oscar Thibault was gifted with a shrewd, clear-sighted judgment which always enabled him, in the lamentable controversies of our troubled times, to see which side was in the right, and to play his part in building up the future."

Antoine registered a tacit protest. "No, that's untrue. Father wore blinkers, and went through life without ever seeing more of it than the hedgerows of the narrow path that he had chosen. One might almost call him an incarnation of the partisan mentality. From his schooldays up, he never made an attempt to think for himself, to take an independent view, to discover, to understand. Always he followed the beaten track. He had donned a livery, and wore it till the end."

"Could anyone desire a finer career?" the vice-admiral continued. "Was not a life like his, gentlemen, the model …?"

"Yes, a livery." Once again Antoine reviewed the attentive audience with a keen glance. "In fact, they're all exactly alike. Interchangeable. Describe one, and you've hit them all off. Shivering, doddering, myopic old men, who're scared of everything: scared of thinking, scared of progress, of whatever might take arms against their stronghold … Steady, now! I'm getting eloquent! Still, 'stronghold' hits it off quite well. They've the mentality of a beleaguered, garrison who're always checking up their numbers, to make sure they're in full force behind their ramparts."

He was feeling more and more ill at ease, and had ceased listening to the orator. However, the sweeping gesture that accompanied the peroration caught his eye.

"Farewell, beloved President. A last farewell. So long as those who saw you at your noble task shall walk the earth …"

The superintendent of the reformatory stepped forth from the group of speakers. He was the last, and he, at least, seemed to have had a fairly close view of the man whose funeral oration he was going to pronounce.

"Our lamented Founder had not the habit of the specious, flattering phrase, when voicing an opinion. No; always eager to get down to acts, he had the courage to disdain those polite subterfuges that lead nowhere… ."

Antoine pricked up his ears; this sounded promising.

"A blunt, forthright manner disguised his natural kindliness, and perhaps added to its efficacy. His uncompromising stands at our council meetings were an expression of his energy, his steadfastness in well-doing, and the high standard he set himself as our President. For him all was a struggle, a struggle that quickly ended in a victory. Everything he said struck home at once; the word, for him, was a keen sword; sometimes, in fact, a sledge-hammer!"

It flashed on Antoine that his father had been a force, and he was surprised to find himself thinking with already well-assured conviction: "Yes, Father might easily have been something more—might have been a really great man."

The superintendent was pointing now towards the rows of boys aligned between their guards. All eyes turned to the young criminals, standing there motionless, blue with cold.

"These juvenile delinquents, doomed from the cradle to fall on evil ways, these lads to whom Oscar Thibault stretched out a helping hand, these unhappy victims of an, alas, very far from perfect social order, are here today, gentlemen, to bear witness to their undying gratitude, and to mourn with us the benefactor who has been taken from them."

"Yes, indeed, Father had all the making of greatness; what might he not have been?" Behind Antoine's insistence lurked a vague hope; an agreeable thought was hovering in the background of his mind. If nature had failed, in his father's case, to endow the robust Thibault stock with its great man …! Why not? With a thrill he pictured the future opening up before him… .

The pall-bearers were shouldering the coffin. Everyone was eager to be gone. The master of ceremonies bowed again, clanging his black wand on the flagstones. Bare-headed, impassive, but inwardly exultant, Antoine took his place at the head of the procession bringing the earthly remains of Oscar Thibault to the grave. *Quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris…* .

# XIII

JACQUES had spent the whole of that morning in his room and, though he had the ground-floor flat to himself—Léon having naturally enough desired to attend the funeral—had double-locked his door. As a precaution against himself, to make sure that when the mourners were filing out he would not peep to see if certain well-remembered figures were amongst them, he had kept the shutters tightly closed. Stretched on his bed, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed vaguely on the pale glow of the ceiling-lamp, he was whistling under his breath.

Towards one o'clock, feeling bored and hungry, he decided to get up. The funeral service in the reformatory chapel must by now, he judged, be well under way. Upstairs, Mademoiselle and Gise must have been back some time from the mass at Saint Thomas Aquinas's, and had presumably begun lunch without him. In any case he was quite decided not to see anyone all day. He would find something to eat, no doubt, in the pantry.

As he crossed the hall on his way to the kitchen, his eyes fell on the newspapers and letters that had been slipped under the front door. And suddenly his heart missed a beat, he bent forward. Yes, that was Daniel's writing: "M. Jacques Thibault."

His hands were trembling so violently that he could hardly open the envelope.

> My dear Jacques,
> Antoine's letter reached me yesterday evening …

Across his mood of black depression the friendly greeting struck like a sword-thrust at his heart and he savagely crumpled the letter tighter and tighter, crushing it in his clenched fist. Then angrily he flung back into his room and locked the door again, without the faintest memory of why he had gone out. After some aimless steps he halted under the lamp, unfolded the crumpled sheet and gazed at it with unsteady eyes, making no effort to read the words till the name he was looking for flashed across his vision.

> … during these last years, Jenny has found the winters in Paris rather trying; both of them left for the South of France a month ago.

Again, as feverishly as before, he screwed up the letter into a ball and this time thrust it into his pocket.

For a while he felt shaken, dazed; then, of a sudden, infinitely relieved.

A minute later—as though the perusal of those lines had changed his decision—he ran to Antoine's desk and opened the time-table. Ever since he had got up, his mind had been on Crouy. If he started at once he could catch the two o'clock express. He would reach Crouy by daylight, but after the funeral was over and all the mourners had left by the return train; there would be no risk of running across anyone he knew. He could go straight to the graveyard and return at once. "Both of them left for the South of France a month ago."

But he had not foreseen the effort of the journey on his already frayed nerves. He found it impossible to sit still. Luckily the train was empty; not only was he alone in the compartment, but in the whole car there was only one other passenger, an elderly lady in black. Jacques fell to walking up and down the corridor, like a wild beast pacing its cage. At first he did not realize that his curious behaviour had attracted the notice of his fellow-traveller, perhaps somewhat alarmed her. Furtively he examined her; never could he encounter anyone the least exceptional in look or manner without pausing a moment to take stock of the specimen of humanity that chance had thrown across his path.

It struck him that the woman had an attractive face. The cheeks were pale and ravaged by the years, but in her eyes there glowed a warm vitality, clouded now with grief, as if her mind were brooding on the past. A look of gentle candour and repose, finely set off by her snow-white hair. She was tastefully dressed in black. Jacques pictured her as an old lady of the provincial middle class, who lived by herself, in quiet, dignified surroundings, and was now on her way back to her home, at Compiègne, perhaps, or at Saint-Quentin. She had no luggage. On the seat beside her lay a large bunch of Parma violets, the stems of which were sheathed in tissue-paper.

Jacques's heart was thudding as he alighted on the Crouy platform. It was deserted. The frosty air was crystal clear.

As he left the station and saw the countryside, a spasm of remembrance gripped his heart. Scorning the short-cut and the highroad alike, he took the road that led by the Calvary—a detour of nearly two miles.

Fierce gusts of wind came roaring up from all four quarters turn by turn, scouring the snow-bound waste with sudden, icy blasts. Somewhere behind the dank, grey cloudwrack a hidden sun was sinking. Jacques walked on rapidly. Though he had eaten nothing since the early morning, he was no longer feeling hungry; the eager air was going to his head. He recognized every turning, every hillock, every thicket. In the distance, at the junction of three roads, the great cross loomed up, ringed by its clump of leafless trees. That track yonder led to Vaumesnil, and this roadmenders' cabin—how often during his daily walks with his attendant he had sheltered in it from the rain! On two or three occasions with Léon; once at least in Arthur's time. How well he recalled Arthur's blunt features and pale eyes, the typical face of a decent Lorraine peasant, one would have thought, till suddenly that evil leer traversed it!

Crueler even than the glacial wind that flayed his cheeks and numbed his fingertips, memory lashed his mind. He had altogether ceased thinking about his father.

Greyly the brief winter day was hastening to its close, but there was still some light left.

On reaching Crouy, he all but took, as in the past, the turning that led off into an obscure back-street—as if he were still afraid of being pointed at by the village children. Yet who would recognize him now, after eight years? Anyway, there was no one in the street,

and all the doors were shut. The life of the village seemed congealed by the cold, though smoke was pouring up from every chimney against the greyness of the sky. The inn came into view flanked by its flight of steps, its signboard creaking in the wind.

Nothing had changed—not even the snow melting upon the chalky road into a grey slush—almost he fancied he was trudging through it still in his heavy "regulation" shoes. That was the inn where, to cut short their walk, old Léon used to imprison him in an empty wash-house, so as to be free to play cards with his cronies in the tap-room. Emerging from the side-street, a beshawled girl in galoshes slip-slopped up the steps. A new servant? he wondered. Or perhaps she was the proprietor's daughter, the child who always used to run away at the sight of the "litde jailbird." Before entering the inn the girl cast a furtive glance at the young man walking by. Jacques quickened his pace.

Now he was at the end of the village. Once he had left the last houses behind him, he saw, ringed round by its lofty walls, alone, aloof, in the midst of the grey plain, the huge, familiar building, snow-capped, pocked with rows of black-barred windows. He quivered in every limb. Nothing had changed. Nothing. The treeless avenue leading to the entrance-gate was now a river of mud. Probably in the wintry twilight a stranger to the place might have had trouble in deciphering the gold inscription on the front. But for Jacques the proud device on which his eyes were fixed was plain to read:

THE OSCAR THIBAULT FOUNDATON

Then only he remembered that the illustrious founder was no more, that the ruts in the drive had been made by the carriages of the funeral procession, that it was for his father's sake he had made the pilgrimage to this place. With a sense of relief at being able to turn his back on these forbidding precincts, he turned and walked in the direction of the two big evergreens flanking the cemetery gate. Usually closed, tonight the iron gate stood open. Wheel-marks showed the path to take. Jacques moved mechanically towards a mound of wreaths wilting in the cold and looking more like a refuse dump than a spread of flowers.

In front of the grave a large bunch of Parma violets, their stems wrapped in tissue-paper, lay all alone upon the snow; presumably it had been placed there after the other flowers.

"That's curious!" Jacques mused, but gave no further thought to the coincidence.

And suddenly, bending above the fresh-turned soil, he had a vision of the dead body lying beneath the sodden turf—exactly as he had seen it at that tragic, ludicrous instant when the undertaker, after a courteous gesture for the family, had drawn the winding-sheet over the face that death had changed already.

" 'Then clinkety and clankety, Along the lanes we'll go!' " Like a bright gash of pain, the foolish jingle rang across his mind; a lump came to his throat.

Ever since he had left Lausanne, he had let himself be hustled blindly on, hour after hour, by the sheer force of events. Now, suddenly, there welled up in his heart a long-forgotten, puerile, inordinate affection, as irrational as irrefutable, bitter with a sense of self-reproach and shame. Now at last he understood why he had come here. He remembered his fits of anger, the moods of scorn and hatred, and the lust for vengeance that had slowly poisoned all his youth. Trivial details that had passed out of memory sped back, like boomerangs, to wound him on the raw. And, for a while, all grievances discarded, restored to filial instinct, he wept on his father's grave. For a brief while he was one of the two persons, unknown to each other, who on natural impulse, keeping aloof from the official rites, had felt a need to come that day and pay the dead the tribute of their grief; one of the only two beings on earth who had sincerely wept for M. Thibault.

But he was too well schooled in facing facts squarely not to see almost at once that such sorrow and grief were overdone. He was perfectly aware that, could his father come back to life, he would loathe and shun him as before. And yet he lingered beside the grave, yielding to a mood of vague sentimentality. He regretted—he knew not what; perhaps what might have been. He even let his imagination picture for a moment an affectionate, generous, understanding father, so as to have the thrill of regretting that he had not been the devoted son such a father merited.

Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned and left the graveyard.

The village seemed a little more animated now. Windows were lighting up. The peasants were coming back, their day's work over.

To avoid passing the houses, he took the road going to Moulin-Neuf, instead of that which led directly to the station, and was almost at once in open country.

He was no longer alone. Something persistent and insidious as an odour had dogged his steps and clung about him, creeping into his each successive thought. It moved beside him in the silence of the plain, across the haze of broken lights that glimmered on the snow and the air grown milder in a brief lull of the gale. Unresisting, he surrendered himself to death's obsession; indeed there was an almost sensual thrill in the vividness with which he now perceived the vanity of life, the futility of all endeavour. What was the use of striving? What was there to hope for? All life is vain, unprofitable. For once we realize death's meaning, nothing, nothing whatever is worth the effort.

He felt that what lay deepest in him was being undermined. Gone was all ambition, all desire to be a leader, to achieve an aim in life. And now it seemed to him that never could he shake off that haunting presence, never regain any sort of peace of mind. He had lost even the impulse to believe that, short as is life's span, a man may yet find time to put something of himself out of the destroyer's reach; that sometimes it is given him to raise a fragment of his dream above the flood that sweeps him down, so that something authentically his may remain floating on the waters that have closed over his head.

He walked straight ahead with rapid, jerky strides like a fugitive hugging to his breast some fragile last possession. Ah, to escape from everything! Not only from the hydra-headed social organism; not only from family and friends and love; not only from himself and from the tyrannies of atavism and habit—but to be rid of something latent and inherent in himself, that absurd vital instinct which makes the sorriest wrecks of humanity still cling to life. Once again, as the supreme and logical solution, the idea of a voluntary eclipse, this time for good and all—of suicide-—hovered in his mind. And suddenly there rose before him the serene beauty of his dead father's face.

"We shall have rest, Uncle Vanya, We shall have rest."

Then his attention was caught, involuntarily, by the rumble of farm-carts coming towards him; he could see their lamps swaying as they jolted on the ruts, and hear the shouts and laughter of the drivers. He could not face the thought of meeting people. Without a

moment's hesitation he jumped the snow-filled ditch bordering the road, stumbled across a ploughed field frozen hard as iron, came on a little wood, and plunged into its darkness. Viciously the thorny undergrowth lashed his face; frozen leaves crackled underfoot. He had deliberately thrust his hands into his pockets, finding a curious relish in the stinging blows across his cheeks, as in a frenzy of escape he forced his way through the dense underbrush. He had no notion where he was going; his one idea was to escape from men, from their ways and highways—from everything.

There was no more than a narrow strip of woodland and he was soon across it. Again he saw in front of him the white plain, ribboned by a road, glimmering under the black sky and, straight ahead, looming upon the skyline, the reformatory, with a row of lighted windows along the floors reserved for class-rooms and the workshops. As he gazed at it a fantastic daydream, vivid as a cinema film, took form in his imagination: he saw himself climbing the low wall of the shed, scrambling up the roof to the storeroom window, breaking the pane, and flinging in a wisp of blazing straw. The pile of spare beds and bedding flared up like a torch; in a trice the fire had spread through the office building to his old cell, devouring everything in it —his bed, table, blackboard, chair, all went up in flames.

He ran his fingers over his scratched cheeks. With a rush of bitterness he realized his impotence—the folly of such dreams.

Resolutely he turned his back on the reformatory, on the graveyard, on his past, and began walking rapidly towards the station.

He had missed the five-forty by a few minutes. There was nothing for it but to wait for the slow train at seven. The waiting-room was like an ice-box and smelled intolerably musty.

For a long while he paced the empty platform, with his cheeks smarting. In his pocket he gripped the crumpled letter from Daniel; he had vowed to himself not to look at it again.

A lamp with a reflector faced the station clock; he went up to it, and, leaning against the wall, fished the crumpled sheets out of his pocket.

> My dear Jacques,
>
> Antoine's letter reached me yesterday evening, and I couldn't sleep a wink. If somehow I could have managed to make a dash to you last night, and see you for just five minutes large as life, I wouldn't have hesitated to take the risk and climb the barrack wall; yes, I'd have done anything to see my oldest, dearest friend again. In these N.C.O.'s lodgings which I share with two other snoring stalwarts, all through the night I stared up at the whitewashed ceiling green with moonlight, and I watched a pageant of our boyhood streaming past—all those wonderful hours we spent together, you and I, at school, and afterwards. You're like a second self to me, Jacques, old pal; I can't imagine how I got on all these years without my second self! And you can be sure—never for a moment did I doubt your friendship. I've just got back from morning drill, and I'm writing to you at once, though I've only Antoine's little note to go on, without even stopping to wonder how you'll take this letter from me, without yet knowing for what earthly reason you maintained for those long years that silence of the grave. How I missed you during those years, and how I miss you now! Most of all, perhaps, I missed you before I was called up for service, when I was at home. Have you any idea of what you meant to me? I wonder. That energy you inspired in me, all the fine things that were latent in me as possibilities only—and which you brought out. Without you, without your friendship, I could never have …

Jacques's hands were trembling as he held the crumpled pages near his eyes; in the dim light, across a mist of tears, he could hardly decipher the affectionate words.

Just above his head an electric bell, piercing as an auger, was shrilling incessantly.

> That's something I don't suppose you ever suspected; in those days I was too vain to admit it, especially to you. And then, when I learned you'd vanished, I simply couldn't imagine what had happened, couldn't believe my ears. I was terribly distressed—most of all by the mystery surrounding it all. Perhaps some day I'll understand. But in my worst moments of anxiety—even of resentment—never once did the idea enter my head, that (assuming you were alive) your feelings for me had changed. And now too, as you see, I don't feel any doubt about them… .
>
> Had to stop. Some tiresome routine work came along. I've taken refuge in a corner of the canteen, though it's out of bounds at this hour. I don't suppose you've the faintest notion what it's like, this world of barracks and parades I was pitchforked into thirteen months ago… . But I'm not writing to you to describe a conscript's life!
>
> The appalling thing, you know, is this feeling that one's lost touch; I don't know how or what to write to you. Of course you can guess the swarm of questions at the tip of my pen! … But what's the use? Still, I do hope you won't mind answering one of them, because it's something I have so terribly at heart. It's this: Am I going to see you again? Is the nightmare over, and have you really come back to us? Or—will you be taking wing again? Look here, Jacques, as I'm pretty sure you'll read this letter anyhow, and as it may be the only chance I'll have of getting in touch with you, please listen to this appeal! I'm prepared to understand and to put up with everything you choose, but I beg you, whatever your future plans may be, don't vanish again so utterly from my life. I need you. If you only knew how proud I am of you, the great things I expect of you, and all that my pride in you can mean to me! Yes, I'm ready to accept all your terms. If you insist on my not knowing your address, on there being no exchange between us, on my never writing—even if you tell me not to pass on to anybody, not even to poor old Antoine, the news I get from you—well, I agree to everything, I pledge myself blindly to obey. Only, please do send me a line now and then, just to show you are alive and sometimes think of me. I'm sorry for those last words—take them as struck out—for I know, I'm certain that you think of me. (That, too, I've never doubted. Never did it cross my mind that, were you alive, you had ceased thinking about me, about our friendship.)
>
> I can't get my ideas straight; I just jot down whatever comes into my head. But that doesn't matter; just to write to you is such a relief after that appalling silence!
>
> I ought to tell you about myself, so that, when you think of me, you can think of me as I am now, and not only as I was when you left us. Perhaps Antoine will tell you. He knows me quite well; we saw a lot of each other after you went away. But I don't know where to begin. There's so much slack to take up, you see; it seems almost hopeless. And then— after all, you

know the way I'm built; I keep moving, I live for the *here* and *now,* I can't look back. This military service cut across my work just when it seemed that I was getting a glimpse of really vital things about myself and about my art—the very things I'd been groping for all my life. Still, I don't regret anything; this experience of army life is something new and very thrilling. It's a great test and a great experience, especially now that I've men under my command. But it's idiotic talking to you about that today.

The one thing that really worries me is having been away from Mother for a year. Especially as I know this separation weighs terribly on both of them. I'm sorry to have to tell you Jenny's health is not all it might be; in fact, we've been quite alarmed about it on several occasions. By "we" I mean, really, *I*, for you know how Mother is, she never will believe that things can turn out badly. Still, even Mother has had to recognize that, during these last years, Jenny has found the winters in Paris rather trying; both of them left for the South of France a month ago. They're staying in a sort of convalescent home where, if it can be fixed up, Jenny will be under treatment till the spring. Poor things, they have more than their share of troubles and anxieties! My father hasn't changed—the less said about him the better. He's in Austria now, but as usual up to his neck in complications.

Dear old pal, it's suddenly come back to me—about *your* father. I'd meant to start this letter with a reference to his death. But somehow I hardly know how to talk to you about your bereavement. Still, when I think of what your feelings must have been, I sympathize most sincerely. For I'm almost certain it must have given you a terrible shock.

I've got to stop now. It's late, and I want to get this letter to the officer in charge of mail. I hope it reaches you safely, and promptly. Now there's one thing more. I've got to write it to you, old pal—on the off chance! Personally I can't get to Paris; I'm tied up here, with not a hope of getting leave. But Lunéville's only five hours away from Paris. I'm in their good graces here; the Colonel's set me to doing some decorative panels in the office—naturally! So I'm pretty free. They'll give me the day off, if you … No, I don't even want to dream of such a thing! As I said, I'm ready to accept and to understand *everything*, with no less love for my one true friend, my friend for life.

Daniel.

Jacques had read the eight sheets through without a break. He remained standing under the lamp, trembling, bewildered, deeply moved, his thoughts in a tumult. He was experiencing more than a swift renewal of his friendship—though this was strong enough to make him feel like taking the first train to Luneville right off; there was something deeper, too: a brooding anguish rankling in a dark, acutely sensitive region of his emotions, on which he neither could nor would let in a ray of light.

He took a few steps, shivering less with the cold than with the fever of his ruffled nerves. He was still holding the letter. Moving back under the hideous stridence of the electric buzzer, he set to reading the letter again, as calmly as he could, from beginning to end… .

Half-past eight had just struck when he left the Gare du Nord. The air was keen and pure, the water in the gutters frozen, the sidewalks dry.

He was faint with hunger. A cafe in the Rue Lafayette caught his eye and, turning in, he sank heavily onto a seat. Without taking off his hat or even troubling to turn down the collar of his overcoat, he dispatched three hard-boiled eggs, a plateful of sauerkraut, and half a loaf of bread.

After satisfying his hunger, he drank two glasses of beer in quick succession, and glanced round the room. It was almost empty. Facing him, at a table on the other side, a woman, dark, broad-shouldered, and still young, was seated in front of an empty glass. The discreet, sympathetic glance she cast in his direction vaguely stirred him. She seemed too quietly dressed to be one of the professionals who prowl about the Paris railway stations. A beginner, perhaps. Their glances met. He looked away; at the least encouragement she would have come and joined him at his table. There was a look of sad experience on her face, yet with it a certain innocence, that had its charm. For a moment he was tempted, in two minds. She seemed a simple soul, very close to nature; and he was utterly unknown to her. It might soothe his nerves… . Now she was gazing at him boldly, perhaps guessing his quandary. He, however, took care not to catch her eye.

At last he made a move, paid the waiter, and went out quickly, without looking her way.

Out in the street the cold gripped him. Should he walk home? No, he was too tired. He went to the edge of the sidewalk, watched the traffic, and hailed the first empty taxi.

As it drew up beside the kerb, he felt a light touch on his elbow. The girl had followed him.

"Come to my place, if you feel like it," she murmured awkwardly. "It's in the Rue Lamartine."

Good-naturedly he shook his head, and opened the taxi door.

"Anyhow, please give me a lift, to 97 Rue Lamartine," she pleaded, as if she had some special reason for wanting to keep with him.

Grinning, the driver looked interrogatively at Jacques.

"Well, sir, is it 97 Rue Lamartine?"

She thought, or made as if she thought, that Jacques had consented, and jumped into the taxi.

"All right," Jacques said. "Make it Rue Lamartine."

The taxi began moving.

"Look here, what's the good of trying to snub me like that?" There was a warm resonance in the voice that went well with her appearance. Then, bending towards him, she added in a tender, soothing tone: "Why, boy, anyone can see you've had a hard knock!"

Gently she pressed him in her arms, and the soft warmth of her caress melted Jacques's reserve.

Yielding to the lure of being consoled, he half stifled a sigh, without replying. Then as if his silence and the sigh were a surrender, she hugged him tighter and, taking off his hat, drew his head onto her breast. He let her have her way. Then a wave of misery came over him and, without knowing why, he burst into tears.

"In trouble with the cops, ain't you?" she whispered. Her voice was trembling.

He was too dumbfounded to protest. But then it struck him that with his scratched cheeks and his trouser-legs caked in mud, he might well pass for a fugitive criminal in this dry, frost-bound Paris. He closed his eyes; that this woman of the streets should take

him for a criminal gave him an exquisite thrill.

As before she read assent into his silence, and pressed his face passionately against her bosom.

Her voice changed yet again; grew alert, conspiratorial.

"Like to lie low for a while at my place?"

"No," he replied, without moving.

It seemed she was schooled to obey, even when she could not understand. After a moment's hesitation, she whispered:

"If you're short of cash, I can help you out."

This time he opened his eyes, sat up.

"What?"

"I've got three hundred and forty francs in there." She patted her little bag. "Like to have them?" In the vulgar voice there was a rather gruff, big-sisterly affection.

Jacques was so touched that he could not reply at once.

"Thanks," he murmured at last, shaking his head. "I don't need it."

The cab slowed down, and drew up in front of a low doorway in an ill-lit, deserted street. Probably, Jacques thought, she would ask him to come in with her. In that case—what?

The problem was quickly solved. She got up and, resting a knee on the seat, hugged Jacques for the last time.

"Poor kid!" she sighed.

Her lips groped for his mouth and pressed it fiercely as if to wrest its secret, taste the savour of a crime; then quickly she released him.

"Anyhow, don't go and get yourself copped, like a damn fool!"

She jumped out of the cab and slammed the door. Then she handed five francs to the driver.

"Take the Rue Saint-Lazare. The gentleman will tell you where to stop."

The car moved off. Jacques had just time to see the girl vanish down a lightless passage, without once looking back.

He was feeling dazed. He passed his hand over his forehead, let down the window. Cold, clean air fanned his cheeks; he drew a deep breath. Then, smiling, he bent forward to the driver.

"Take me to 4A Rue de l'Université, please," he called out gaily.

# XIV

NO SOONER had the last mourners filed out of the graveyard than Antoine took a car to Compiègne on the pretext that he had orders to give the monument-mason. In reality he wished to avoid the crowd returning by the first train back. The five-thirty express would get him to Paris in time for dinner, and, with luck, he would travel back alone.

Luck was against him.

When, some minutes before the train was due, he stepped onto the platform, to his surprise he at once ran into the Abbé Vécard. It was all Antoine could do to conceal his vexation. The priest explained. "The Bishop was kind enough to bring me here in his car; he wanted to have a chat." Then he noticed Antoine's look of weariness and gloom. "I'm afraid, my dear Antoine, you must be quite worn out. Such a crowd and all those speeches! Yet, later on, you'll look back on this day as a very memorable occasion. What a pity Jacques wasn't present!"

Antoine was beginning to explain how, in the present circumstances, his brother's absence seemed to him natural enough, when the priest broke in.

"Yes, yes, I quite follow you. It was wiser he should stay away. But I do hope you'll let him know how—er—edifying the ceremony was. You'll do that, won't you?"

Antoine could not refrain from querying the term the priest had used.

" 'Edifying'? Well, for others, perhaps. But not for me. I assure you that all that pomp, all that eloquence-to-order …"

His eyes, meeting the priest's, found in them an understanding twinkle. Obviously he shared Antoine's views of the speeches they had heard that afternoon.

The train was coming in.

Noticing an empty car, they entered it, even though it was ill-lit.

"May I propose a cigarette, Abbé?"

Gravely the priest raised his forefinger to his lips.

"Tempter!" he smiled, taking a cigarette. Puckering his eyelids he lit it, puffed, withdrew it from his lips, and examined it with gusto as he blew the smoke out through his nostrils.

"In a ceremony of that kind," he continued good-humouredly, "there's always bound to be a side that is—as your friend Nietzsche would put it—human, all-too-human. And yet, when all that is discounted, the fact remains that such collective manifestations of the religious and moral sentiments have something that stirs our hearts, to which we can't help responding. Isn't that so?"

Antoine did not reply at once. Then, "I wonder!" he murmured dubiously. Again he fell silent, gazing pensively at the man in front of him.

For twenty years he had been familiar with the Abbé's placid countenance, the shrewd insistence of his gentle eyes, his confidential tone, the air of constant meditation given him by the poise of his head always drooping a little to the left, and the way he had of fluttering his hands at the level of his chest. But tonight he found that something had changed in their relations. Hitherto he had always thought of the Abbé Vécard in terms of M. Thibault—as his father's spiritual mentor. Now death had struck out the middle term. The reasons which formerly had led him to adopt a wise reserve in dealing with the priest had lost their cogency; now he could treat the Abbé as man to man.

After his trying day, he found it harder than usual to tone down the expression of his thoughts, and it was a relief for him to declare bluntly:

"Well, I must own that sentiments of that kind mean nothing, nothing whatever, to me."

The priest assumed a slightly bantering tone.

"Still, unless I'm greatly mistaken, the religious emotion has its place amongst human emotions, and indeed is recognized as fairly widespread in mankind. What's your opinion, my friend?"

Antoine was in no mood for trifling.

"I've never forgotten something Abbé Leclerc, my tutor when I was reading for my philosophy degree, once said to me. 'There are some quite intelligent people who have no feeling for art. You, I suspect, have no feeling for religion.' The worthy man was merely indulging in an epigram. But I've always thought that the remark was absolutely true."

"Supposing it were so," the Abbé replied, in the same tone of affectionate irony, "you'd be greatly to be pitied, I'm afraid! You'd be cut off from half of life. Yes, there are hardly any major problems of life of which it isn't true to say that a man who's unable to bring a religious sentiment to bear on them is doomed to see only a paltry fraction. That's what makes the beauty of our religion… . Why do you smile?"

Antoine could not think why he had smiled. Perhaps it was merely a trick of the nerves, natural enough after the emotions of the past week and the trying day he had been through.

"Come now!" The priest, in his turn, smiled. "Can you deny there's beauty in our faith?"

"Of course not," Antoine cheerfully asserted. "I'll allow it all the 'beauty' you like," he added teasingly. "But, all the same …"

"Well?"

"All the same, beauty's not enough. It should be rational as well."

The Abbé's hands fluttered in amiable deprecation.

" 'Rational'!" The soft brooding tone suggested that the word conjured up a host of problems which, for the moment, he was not disposed to tackle, but to which he had the key. After some reflection he went on in a more pugnacious tone:

"Perhaps you are one of those who fancy religion is losing ground in the modern mind?"

"Frankly, I haven't a notion." Antoine's moderation. surprised the Abbé. "Very likely not. It's even possible that the activities of the most modern minds—I'm thinking of the very men who are furthest from dogmatic faith—tend indirectly towards assembling the elements of a religion. Towards—how shall I put it?—bringing together concepts that, taken as a whole, would constitute an entity not so very different from many Christians' idea of God."

The priest nodded. "How could it be otherwise, human nature being what it is? Only in religion can a man find a compensation for the lower instincts he discovers in himself. It is his only dignity. And it is also the only solace for his griefs, his only source of resignation."

"You're right there!" There was a ring of irony in Antoine's voice. "Men who set a higher value on the truth than on their peace of mind are pretty rare. And religion is the supreme purveyor of peace of mind. But you must forgive me, Abbé, if I remind you there are others, in whom the desire to understand is more imperative than the craving to believe. And such people …"

"Such people," the priest broke in, "cling to the cramped, precarious assurances of reasoning and the .intellect; and never get beyond them. Well, we can only pity them—we whose faith lives and moves on another, infinitely vaster plane, the plane of feeling and volition. Don't you agree?"

Antoine's smile was non-committal. The light in the compartment was too dim for the priest to see it, but the fact that he proceeded to enlarge upon the theme showed he was not altogether dupe of the "we" he had just used.

"People think they're very enlightened nowadays because they insist on 'understanding' things. But believing is understanding. No, it would be better to say that there's no common ground between understanding and believing. Some today refuse to accept as true what their intellect, inadequately trained or warped by a subversive education, is unable to prove to its satisfaction. The explanation's simple: they are the victims of their limitations. It's perfectly feasible to understand God's existence, and to prove it logically. From Aristotle on— and we mustn't forget he was the master of Saint Thomas Aquinas—logical proof has never been lacking… ."

So far Antoine had refrained from any overt protest, but now the gaze he cast on the priest was frankly sceptical.

His companion's silence was making the Abbé ill at ease, and he hastened to continue. "Our religious philosophy, when dealing with these subjects, furnishes the most closely reasoned arguments… ."

"Excuse me," Antoine broke in at last, genially enough, "but are you sure you've the right to talk about 'religious philosophy' or 'closely reasoned arguments' in such a connexion?"

"What's that?" The priest sounded positively shocked. "Why shouldn't I have the right …?"

"Well, for one thing, strictly speaking, religious 'thought' is usually a misnomer, for behind all thinking there lies doubt… ."

"Steady there, my young friend!" the Abbé cried. "Where's that theory going to lead us?"

"Oh, I know, the Church doesn't worry over trifles like that. But all the ingenious devices the Church has been applying, for a hundred years and more, to reconcile faith with modern science and philosophy are—if you'll forgive me the expression—more or less faked. Obviously so, since what keeps faith alive and is its object—the quality which appeals so strongly to the religious mind—is precisely that supernatural element which is denied by science and philosophy."

The Abbé was beginning to fidget in his seat; it was dawning on him that this was a serious argument. A note of petulance crept into his voice.

"You seem to overlook the fact that it's by dint of using their brains, by philosophical reasoning, that most of the younger generation nowadays come by faith."

"I wonder!"

"Your reasons, please!"

"Well, I must admit that I can't picture faith as anything other than a blind, intuitive acceptance. And when it claims to be founded on logic …!"

"Have you the old-fashioned notion that science and philosophy deny the supernatural? That's k mistake, my dear fellow—a glaring mistake. Science leaves it out, and that's a very different thing. As for philosophy, every philosophy worthy of the name …"

' "Worthy of the name'! Excellent! That way all dangerous opponents are put out of court."

Ignoring Antoine's irony, the priest went on: "Every philosophy worthy of the name leads us inevitably to the supernatural. But let's go further; let's suppose your modern scientists contrive to show that there's a fundamental opposition between the 'laws' they have discovered and the teachings of the Church—an absurd, not to say Machiavellian hypothesis in the present state of our Christian apologetics—what would that prove, I ask you?"

"Ask me another!" Antoine smiled.

"Nothing at all!" the priest exclaimed with gusto. "It would merely show that the human intellect is incapable of co-ordinating its data, and that its progress is a blundering one at best; a fact," he added with a friendly chuckle, "which is no news to a good many of us.

"Come, Antoine, we're not living in Voltaire's time. Need I remind you that the victories which the so-called reason vaunted by your atheist philosophers scored over religion were but short-lived, illusive victories? Is there a single article of faith regarding which the Church has ever been convicted of defective logic?"

"Not one, I grant you willingly," Antoine broke in with a laugh. "The Church has always had the knack of holding its own in a tight corner. Your theologians are past masters in the art of inventing subtle, seemingly logical arguments that save them from being badgered very long by rationalist appeals to reason. Especially of recent years, I've noticed, they have been displaying a skill at the logic-chopping game that's positively staggering! Still, all that takes in only those who start off by wanting to be taken in."

"No, my friend. You may be sure that if the logic of the Church has always the last word that is because it's …"

"Shrewder, more persistent… ."

"No. More profound than yours. Perhaps you'll agree with me that the human intellect, left to its own devices, can achieve nothing better than elaborate structures of mere words, which leave the heart, the emotions, unsatisfied. Why should that be? It isn't only that there's a whole order of verities which seems to lie outside the field of normal argument, nor yet because the idea of God seems to transcend the possibilities of normal understanding. Above all—please mark well my words—it's because our reasoning faculty left to itself fails us here, can get no grip on these subtle problems. In other words, a real, lively faith has every right to insist on such explanations as may wholly satisfy the intellect; but our intellect itself must first submit to be schooled by Grace—for Grace

enlightens the faculty of reason. The true believer does not merely set out, using his intellect to the utmost, in quest of God; he must also humbly offer himself to God, who is in quest of him. And when by dint of reasoning he has made his upward way into God's presence, he should divest himself of thought, and—how shall I put it?—lay himself open to receive within him the recompense of his quest, the God that he has sought."

After a pregnant silence Antoine rejoined: "Which is tantamount to saying that reasoned thought is not enough to guide us to the truth; we also need what you call Grace. That, I must say, is a very damaging admission."

His tone was such that the priest could not help exclaiming:

"Ah, I'm sorry for you indeed, Antoine! You're one of the victims of our times—a rationalist!"

"I'm … well, it's always hard to say just what one is. Still I admit I stand by the satisfactions of the intellect."

The priest's hands fluttered. "And by the blandishments of doubt, as well. It's a survival of the romantic era; that sense of glorious audacity—and Byronic anguish—tickles the vanity, of course."

"No," Antoine cried, "you're absolutely wrong there! I haven't the least sense of audacity or anguish, and I've no use for those muzzy states of mind you're thinking of. Nobody could be less romantic than I. And I don't suffer from 'soul-searchings,' as they call them." No sooner had he made the statement than he realized it was no longer strictly true. Doubtless he had no soul-searchings such as the Abbé Vécard had in mind—on the score of religion. But during the past three or four years he too had been apt to ponder, not without anguish, on the problem of man's place and function in the universe. After a while he added: "What's more, it would be wrong to say I've lost my faith; I rather think I never had it."

"Oh, come now!" the Abbé exclaimed. "Have you forgotten, Antoine, what a religious little boy you used to be?"

"Religious? No. Docile; serious and obedient, nothing more. I was naturally amenable to discipline, and I performed my religious duties like the good little boy I was! That's all."

"No, no! You're deliberately understating your faith in early years."

"It wasn't faith, but a religious upbringing, which is a very different thing."

Antoine was trying less to startle the Abbé than to be sincere. His weariness had given place, to a mild exhilaration, which urged him to hold his own in the argument. And now he launched out into a sort of stock-taking, such as he had rarely made before, of his early life.

"Yes, it's a question of upbringing. And, Abbé, just consider how neatly it all links up together. From when he's four, his mother, his nurse, all the grown-ups on whom a child relies, keep dinning into his ears, on every pretext: 'God is in heaven; God made you, and He watches you; God loves you, sees you, judges you; God will punish you if you're naughty, reward you if you're good.' What next? When he's eight he's taken to mass and sees all the grown-up people round him bowing and kneeling; a beautiful gold monstrance is pointed out to him, gleaming amongst flowers and lights, across a haze of incense and music—and it's the same God who's present there, in the white Host. Right! What next? When he's eleven he is told about the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection, Immaculate Conception, and all the rest of it—in a tone that carries conviction, from the august eminence of a pulpit. He listens, and believes all he is told. How should he not believe? How could he feel the least doubt about beliefs publicly avowed by his parents, school-fellows, masters, and by all the congregation in the church? How could a little boy like him question these holy mysteries? From the day he was born he's been coming up against equally bewildering phenomena; he is a small, lost waif in a mysterious universe. That, sir, in my opinion is a point of vital importance; in fact, it's the key to the whole problem. For a child everything is equally incomprehensible. The earth, which looks so flat, is round; it doesn't seem to move, yet it's spinning like a top. The sun makes seeds germinate; a live chick comes out of an egg. The Son of God came down from heaven, and died on the cross to redeem us from our sins. Why not? God was the Word, and the Word was made flesh. … It may mean something, or it may not. No matter! The trick has worked."

The train had just stopped. A voice in the darkness bawled the name of a station. Supposing the car empty, somebody opened the door hastily and slammed it to again, with a curse. A blast of icy wind buffeted their faces.

Antoine turned again towards the Abbé, but the light had grown still feebler and he could make little of his expression.

As the priest made no remark, Antoine continued, in a calmer tone: "Well, can that childish credulity be described as 'faith'? Certainly not. Faith is something that comes later. It springs from different roots. And, personally, I can assure you I have never had it."

"It would be truer to say that, though the soil was well prepared for it, you never gave it a chance of springing up in your soul." The Abbé's voice was vibrant with indignation. "Faith is a gift from God— like the faculty of memory; and like memory, like all God's gifts, it requires cultivation. But you—you, like so many others, yielded to pride, to the spirit of contradiction, to the lures of 'free thinking,' to the temptation of rebelling against established order."

No sooner made, than the priest regretted his outburst, justified though it was. He was firmly resolved not to be drawn into a prolonged discussion of religion.

Moreover, the Abbé misinterpreted Antoine's tone. Struck by its incisiveness, its ardour, and the gay truculence which gave the young man's words an air of rather forced bravado, he preferred to question the speaker's absolute sincerity!. He still entertained the utmost respect for Antoine, and behind it lurked a hope—more than a hope, a firm conviction—that M. Thibault's elder son would not long persist in such lamentable, indefensible opinions.

Antoine was pondering.

"No," he said composedly. "You're wrong there. It came about quite naturally; neither pride nor a rebellious spirit played any part. Why, I didn't even have to give it a thought. As far as I remember, I began, at the time of my first communion, to have a vague feeling that there was—how shall I put it?—that there was a catch somewhere in what we were taught about 'religion; a sort of murkiness, not only for us but for everyone, for the grown-ups as well. Even for our priests!"

The Abbé could not withhold a flutter of his hands.

"Don't imagine," Antoine explained, "that I doubted then, or have the least doubt now, as to the sincerity of the priests I've known, or their zeal—perhaps I should say, their need for zeal. But they certainly gave me the impression of men uneasily groping in the dark, uncertain of their bearings, and turning round and round those abstruse doctrines I've mentioned with an unconscious diffidence. They made assertions, yes. But what did they assert? What had been asserted to them. Of course, they had no actual

doubts about those doctrines of which they were the mouthpiece. But deep down in their hearts did they feel quite so sure as their dogmatic tone implied? Well, somehow I couldn't convince myself they were so sure as all that. Do I shock you? We had, you see, another set of men to match them with—our masters. Those laymen, I confess, seemed to me much more at ease in their special field of learning, much more sure of their ground. Whether they expounded history, grammar, or geometry, they always gave us the impression that they knew their subjects from A to Z!"

The Abbé pursed his lips. "Before making a comparison, one must be sure the things compared are comparable."

"Oh, I'm not thinking of the subject-matter of their teaching; I have in mind only the angle from which those specialists approached their subjects. There was never anything evasive about their attitude, even when their knowledge happened to fall short; they made no secret of their doubts, or even of the blind spots in their learning. And that, believe me, inspired confidence; it ruled out the least suspicion of … of humbug. No, humbug isn't what I meant. Still I must admit that, in the next phase of my education, the more I came in contact with the priests at the Ecole, the less they inspired in me the feeling of security I had got from my lay teachers."

"If the priests under whom you studied had been true theologians, you'd have got an impression of perfect security from your intercourse with them." The Abbé was thinking of the professors of his seminary, of his studious youth unruffled by the faintest doubt.

Antoine did not seem to hear him. "Just think," he exclaimed, "what it means to a youngster, when he's turned loose, by gradual stages, on mathematics, physics, chemistry! Suddenly he discovers that he has all space, the universe, for his playground. And after that, religion strikes him as not only cramped, but false, illogical. Untrustworthy."

This time the Abbé drew back and stretched forth his arm. "Illogical? Can you seriously apply that term to it: illogical?"

"Yes!" Antoine retorted vehemently. "And I've just hit on something I hadn't realized before. You upholders of religion start out with a firm belief, and to shore up that belief you call in logic; whereas people like myself begin with doubt, indifference, and we take reason for our guide, not knowing where it will lead us.

"Of course," he went on at once with a smile, before the priest had time to put in a retort, "if you set to arguing it out with me, it will be child's play for you to prove I don't know the first word on the subject. I admit that right away. I've given very little thought to such matters; perhaps never so much as tonight. So you see I'm not trying to set up as a thoroughgoing rationalist. I'm only trying to explain why a Catholic upbringing has not prevented me from coming to my present state—a state of total unbelief."

"My dear fellow," the Abbé put in, with a slightly forced geniality, "your plain speaking doesn't shock me in the least. For I'm sure you're very far from being so black ^s you paint yourself! But go on; I'm listening."

"Well, I continued—like so many others—observing my religious duties all the same. With an indifference which I wouldn't acknowledge even to myself; a polite indifference. Even in later years I never settled down to a serious stock-taking of my beliefs. Most likely because at bottom I didn't attach enough importance to them. Yes, I was very far from the state of mind of one of my fellow-students who was taking the Applied Arts course; he said to me one day, after he'd been through a phase of soul-searching: 'I've given the whole bag of tricks a thorough look-over; take my word for it, boy, there's far too many loose ends, it doesn't hang together.' At that time I was just starting my medical course, and the break—or, rather, estrangement—had already come about. I hadn't waited for the semi-scientific studies of my first year to discover that one can't believe without evidence …"

"Without evidence!"

"… and that we must dispense with any notion of immutable truth, since nothing should be considered 'true' except conditionally,

until the contrary is proved. Yes, I continue to shock you! But, if you'll allow me to say so (in fact it's what I've been driving at all the time), I'm that unusual thing—that freak of nature, if you like—a natural, congenital sceptic. Yes, I'm built that way. I'm in sound health and, so far as I can judge, pretty levelheaded. I've an active mind, and I've always got on perfectly well without a spark of mysticism. Nothing of what I know, nothing I've observed, warrants my believing that my childhood's God exists; and so far, I must confess, I've found I can do admirably without Him.

"My atheism and my mind developed side by side, so I've never had any allegiance to renounce. No, don't imagine for a moment that I'm one of those believers who have lost their faith, and in their hearts are always craving after God; one of those uneasy souls who make desperate gestures towards the heaven they have found empty. No, desperate gestures aren't in my line at all! There's nothing about a godless world that disturbs me; indeed, as you see, I'm perfectly at home in it."

The Abbé's hand waved a mild disclaimer.

Antoine repeated: "Perfectly at home. And that's been so for fifteen years."

He expected the priest's indignation to blaze up at once. But the Abbé said nothing for some moments, and merely shook his head composedly. At last he spoke.

"But, my dear man, that's pure materialism. Are you still at that stage? To listen to you, one would think you believe only in your body. It's as if you believed in only half—and what a half!—of your self. Happily, all that is merely on the surface; an outer shell, so to speak. You yourself don't realize that deep down in you is something vital and enduring, the influence of your Christian education. You may deny that influence; but it's the directive force of your existence."

"What can I reply? I can only answer you that I owe nothing to the Church. My temperament, ambitions, intellect, took form outside the pale of religion—I might even say in opposition to it. I feel as remote from Catholic mythology as from pagan mythology. I make no distinction between religion and superstition. To speak quite candidly, what remains to me of my Christian education is precisely—*nil*!"

"What blindness!" the Abbé' exclaimed, with a quick uplift of his arms. "Can't you see that your whole scheme of life—your conscientiousness, your sense of du:y, your devotion to the service of your fellow-men—gives your materialism the lie direct? Few lives imply more clearly the existence of God. No one has more strongly than you the feeling of a.mission to fulfill. No one has a better sense than you of his responsibilities in this world. Well, isn't all that a tacit admission that you're under orders from above? To whom, if not to God, can you feel yourself responsible?"

Antoine did not reply at once, and for a moment the Abbé could think his argument had told. In point of fact, on Antoine's view, it was the merest moonshine. His scrupulous performance of his work did not necessarily imply the existence of God, or the value of Christian teachings, or any metaphysical truth. Was he not the living proof of it? Nevertheless he could help recognizing, yet once

again, that there was a baffling incompatibility between the extreme conscientiousness that inspired his conduct and his repudiation of any moral code. A man must love his work. Why that "must"? he wondered. Because man is a social animal, and it's up to him to do his best for the smooth running of society, for progress. "Up to him!" A gratuitous assumption, that; a question-begging postulate. Again there rose in his mind the query which he had put to himself so often, to which he had never found a satisfactory answer: What, then, is this authority that I obey?

"Oh, well," he murmured, "shall we call it conscience? The hallmark left on everyone of us by nineteen centuries of Christendom. Perhaps I was over-hasty just now when I set down at *nil* the factor of my upbringing, or, rather, my heredity."

"No, my friend, what has survived in you is the holy leaven to which I was referring. Some day it will become active once more—till the whole is leavened! And then your moral life, which now is following its own course more or less against your wish, will find its proper sphere, its true meaning. No man can understand God when he is rejecting Him, or even while he is searching for Him. You'll see! One day you'll discover that, without wanting it, you've entered port. And then at last you'll know that it's enough to believe in God for everything to become clear, everything to fall into place."

"I grant you that," Antoine smiled, "readily enough. I'm aware that, oftener than not, our ailments create their own remedies; and I'm quite prepared to agree that the majority of people have such an instinctive, urgent craving to believe that they don't give much thought to whether what they believe deserves belief. They label 'truth' whatever their need for faith impels them to accept. In any case," he added in the tone of an aside, "I'm not easily to be convinced that most intelligent Catholics, and particularly priests who are men of learning, aren't pragmatists more or less, without their knowing it. What I find unacceptable in Christian dogma should be equally unacceptable to other cultivated men who think on modern lines. The trouble is, believers cling to their faith and, to avoid imperilling it, refrain from thinking things out. They take their stand on the emotional and ethical aspects of religion. And of course they've had it drummed into their heads so effectively that the Church has given an answer once for all to every possible objection, that they never think of looking into it for themselves. But excuse me—that's only by the way. What I wanted to say was that, however universal the craving to believe may be, that's not a sufficient justification for the Christian faith, cluttered up as it is with ancient myths and abstrusities… ."

"When one is aware of God," the priest said, "there's no need to 'justify' Him." For the first time his tone brooked no reply. Then leaning towards Antoine, with a friendly gesture, he went on: "The amazing thing is that it should be you, Antoine Thibault, of all people, who speak thus. In many Christian homes, alas, the children see their parents behaving, life going on, almost as if the God about whom they hear so much did not exist. But you—why, from your earliest childhood you could feel God's presence in your home, at every instant! You saw your late lamented father guided by God in everything he did."

There was a pause. Antoine gazed at the Abbé fixedly, as if he were trying to keep himself from speech. At last, through close-set lips, he muttered:

"Yes. And that's the trouble. I've never seen God except through the medium of my father." His attitude and tone expressed what he had left unsaid. Then, to cut short, he added: "But this is no day to dwell on that subject."

He pressed his forehead to the pane. "We're coming into Creil," he said.

The train slowed down, stopped. The lamp in the car came on brighter. Antoine hoped some passenger would enter; his presence would break off their conversation. But the platform seemed quite empty.

The train drew out.

After a longish silence, during which each man seemed lost in his private meditations, Antoine turned again towards the Abbé.

"The truth is there are at least two things that will always prevent me from returning to the Catholic fold. One is the matter of sin; I'm incapable, it seems, of feeling any horror of sin. The other is the question of Providence; I shall never be able to accept the notion of a personal God."

The Abbé said nothing.

"Yes," Antoine went on, "all that you Catholics call sin is, on my view, precisely all that is strong and vital—instinctive and … instructive! It's what enables us (how shall I put it?) to lay our hands on things. And to go ahead. No progress—oh, I'm not unduly hypnotized by that blessed word 'progress,' but it comes in handy—no progress would have been feasible had men always, in blind obedience, kept from sin. But that subject would lead us too far afield," he added, countering the priest's deprecatory gesture with an ironic smile. "As for the theory of a Divine Providence—no, I can't swallow it! If there's one theory that strikes me as absolutely indefeasible, it's that of the utter indifference of the universe."

The priest gave a start. "But surely even that science of yours, whether it wants to or not, has to take its stand on universal order. (I deliberately avoid using the more correct term: a Divine Purpose.) Don't you see that if we ventured to deny that higher Intelligence which controls phenomena and whose signature is visible on all things here below; if we refused to admit that everything in nature has its purpose and all has been created to fit into a harmonious whole— don't you see it would be impossible to make sense of anything at all?"

"Well, why not admit it? The universe is incomprehensible for us. I accept that as a premise."

"That 'incomprehensible,' my friend, is God."

"Not as I see it. I haven't yet succumbed to the temptation of labelling all I can't understand as 'God.' "

He smiled and fell silent for some moments. The Abbé watched his face, on the defensive. Still smiling, Antoine spoke again:

"In any case, for the majority of Catholics, their idea of the Divine resolves itself into the rather puerile conception of a paternal God, a small private deity who has his eye on each of us, who follows with sympathetic interest each flicker of the tiny flame of individual conscience, and whom each of us can perpetually consult in prayers beginning: 'Enlighten me, O Lord,' or: 'Merciful God, grant me Thy aid,' and the like.

"Please don't mistake me. I haven't the least wish to wound your feelings by cheap sneers at religion. But I can't bring myself to imagine how anyone can seriously think there is the slightest mental intercourse, the least exchange of question and answer, between any given man—a tiny by-product of universal life—or even this Earth of ours, a speck of dust amid how many myriad others, and the great Whole, the Scheme of Things. How can we ascribe to it such anthropomorphic emotions as paternal love and kindliness of heart? How can we take seriously the functions of the sacraments, the rosary, and—only think of it!—a mass paid for and celebrated for the special benefit of a soul provisionally interned in Purgatory? When you come to think of it, there's little real difference

between these rites, these practices of Catholicism, and those of any primitive religion, the sacrifices and the offerings made by savages to their gods."

The Abbé was on the point of replying that there certainly existed a *natural* religion common to mankind; a fact which, as it happened, was an article of faith. But once more he held his peace. Huddled in his corner, his arms folded, his fingers tucked inside his sleeves, he was a figure of sage, mildly ironic patience, as he waited for the young man to conclude his tirade.

Moreover, they were approaching Paris; the train was already swaying upon the switches of the suburban lines. Across the misted panes the darkness glittered with pinpoint lights.

Antoine, who had still something to say, made haste to continue:

"By the way, sir, I hope you won't misconstrue certain terms I employed. I admit that I'm a mere amateur in metaphysics and I'm not in the least qualified to discuss such matters; still, I'd rather speak my mind out frankly. I talked ^just now about Universal Order and a Scheme of Things; but that was merely to talk like everyone else. Actually it seems to me that we've as many reasons to question the existence of a Scheme of Things as to take it for granted. From his actual viewpoint the human animal I am observes an immense tangle of conflicting forces. But do these forces obey a universal law outside themselves, distinct from them?l Or do they, rather, obey—so to speak— internal laws, each atom being a law unto itself, that compels it to work out a kind of 'personal' destiny? I see these forces obeying laws which do not control them from outside, but join up with them, which do nothing more than in some way stimulate them… . And anyhow, what a jumble it is, the course of natural phenomena! I'd just as soon believe that causes spring from each other *ad infinitum*, each cause being the effect of another cause, and each effect the cause of other effects. Why should one want to assume at all costs a Scheme of Things? It's only another bait for our logic-ridden minds. Why try to find a common 'purpose in the movements of atoms endlessly clashing and glancing off each other? Personally, I've often told myself that everything happens just a^ if nothing led to anything, as if nothing had a meaning."

The priest looked silently at Antoine, then lowered his eyes and remarked with an icy smile:

"That said, I doubt if it's possible for a man to sink lower."

Rising, he began to button his overcoat.

Antoine was feeling genuinely remorseful. "I hope you'll forgive me, sir, for telling you all this. This sort of conversation never leads to anything, and I can't think what came over me this evening."

They were standing side by side. The Abbé gazed sadly at the young man.

"You've spoken to me frankly, as a man speaks to his friend. For that, at least, I'm grateful."

He seemed on the brink of adding something. But the train was stopping.

"May I take you to your place?" Antoine suggested in a different tone.

"Thanks, that would be kind of you."

In the taxi Antoine said little; his mind was once again engrossed by the difficult problems of the immediate future. And his companion, who seemed in a brown study, was equally taciturn. When, however, they had crossed the Seine, the priest bent towards Antoine.

"You're—how old exactly? Thirty?"

"Nearly thirty-three."

"You are still a young man. Wait and see! Others have ended by understanding. Your turn will come. There are hours in every life when a man can't dispense with God; one hour especially, the most terrible of all, the last… ."

"Yes," Antoine mused. "That dread of death, how heavily it weighs on every civilized European! So much so that it more or less ruins his zest for life."

The priest had been on the point of alluding to M. Thibault's death, but checked the impulse.

"Can you imagine what it's like," he continued, "coming to the brink of eternity without faith in God, without discerning, on the further shore, an almighty, merciful Father stretching out His arms in welcome? Do you realize what it means, dying in utter darkness, without a single gleam of hope?"

"All that," Antoine put in briskly, "I know as well as you do." He too had been thinking of his father's death. After a momentary hesitation, he went on: "My profession, like yours, takes me to the bedside of the dying. I, perhaps, have seen more unbelievers die than you have, and I've such hideous recollections of those deathbeds, that I wish I could give my patients *in extremis* an injection of belief. I'm not one of those who feel a mystical veneration for the stoic's way of facing death. And, quite sincerely, I wish for myself that, at that moment, I may be open to all the consolations faith can give. I dread a death without hope as much as a death-agony without morphine."

He felt the priest's hand touch his; it was trembling a little. Probably the Abbé was trying to construe this frank admission as a hopeful sign.

"How right you are!" The priest squeezed Antoine's arm with a warmth that seemed almost akin to gratitude. "Well, take my advice, don't seal up every way of approach to this Consoler whose help you'll need, like all of us, one day. What I mean is: don't give up prayer."

"Prayer?" Antoine shook his head. "That blind appeal—to what? To that problematic Scheme of Things! To a deaf and dumb abstraction, that takes no heed of us!"

"Call it what you will, but that 'blind appeal,' believe me, *tells*. Yes, Antoine, whatever may be the name which for the moment you assign to it, whatever form this notion of an Immanent Will behind phenomena, a Law of which you have brief glimpses, may now take in your mind, you should, however much it goes against the grain, turn towards it—and pray. Ah, do anything, I implore you, anything rather than immure yourself in' blank aloofness. Keep in touch with the Infinite, address it in whatever terms you can, even if for the moment there's no reciprocity, if you seem to hear no answering voice. Call it what you like—inscrutable mystery, impersonal force, immeasurable darkness—but pray to it. Pray to the Unknowable. Only pray! Don't disdain that 'blind appeal,' for to that appeal, as one day you will know, there answers suddenly a still small voice, a miraculous consolation."

Antoine said nothing. "Our minds," he thought, "are in water-tight compartments." But, realizing the priest was deeply moved, he decided to say nothing further that might wound his feelings. In any case, they had reached his house and the car was slowing up. The Abbé Vécard took Antoine's pro ered hand and clasped it. Before stepping out, he leaned forward in the darkness and murmured in a tone Antoine had not yet heard him use: "The Catholic religion, my friend, is very di erent from what you think; believe me, it means far, far more than what you've been given to see of it up till now."

# PART VII
# SUMMER 1914
# PART A

## Chapter I

JACQUES was getting tired; his neck was stiff from holding the pose, and the only movement he dared make was with his eyes to cast a furious look at his tormentor.

In two elastic strides Paterson had backed to the wall; palette in hand and brush in air, he was bending his head this side and that, in rapt contemplation of the canvas on his easel three yards away. Jacques was thinking: "What a lucky fellow he is to have his painting!" His eyes fell on his wristwatch. "Got to have that article finished by this evening. But a fat lot Pat cares for that, confound him!"

The heat was stifling; ruthlessly the sunlight blazed in through the window. Though the room, in former days a kitchen, was on the top floor of a building near the Cathedral and high above the town, neither the Alps nor the lake could be seen; only the dazzling blue of the June sky confronted it.

At the back of the room, under the sloping roof, two mattresses sprawled side by side on the tiled floor. Clothes hung on nails along the walls; in the sink, on the rusty kitchen-stove, and along the ledge of the iron hood above it, lay a jumble of the most incongruous objects: a dented basin, a pair of slippers, a cigar-box filled with empty paint-tubes, a shaving-brush caked with lather, some cups and plates, two dead roses in a tumbler, a bulldog pipe. A number of canvases stood on the floor, their faces to the wall against which they leaned.

The Englishman was naked from the waist up. His teeth were clenched and he was breathing heavily through his nose, as if he had been sprinting.

"Yes, it's a teaser!" he grumbled, without turning his head.

Sweat glistened on his chest, and the muscles rippled under the fine-grained skin, white with the limpid whiteness peculiar to Northerners. A triangle of shadow at the base of his thorax bespoke his leanness. Under the threadbare old trousers the sinews of his legs could be seen quivering with the strain of his intense preoccupation.

"And there's not a shred of tobacco left!" he sighed.

On his arrival Jacques had produced three cigarettes from his pocket; the painter had smoked them greedily, in quick succession, at the beginning of the sitting. Hunger gnawed at his stomach, which had gone empty since the previous day, but that was nothing new to him. He was thinking: "How marvelously luminous that forehead is! Have I enough white?" He glanced toward the tube of white lying on the floor, flat as a razor-blade. He owed a good hundred francs to Guérin, who kept the paint-shop, but luckily Guérin, an ex-anarchist recently converted to socialism, was a good comrade… .

His eyes still intent on the portrait, Paterson made a wry face, as though he were alone. His brush described a flourish on the empty air. And suddenly the blue eyes turned, settling on Jacques with an unblinking birdlike stare, a magpie's, inhumanly intent.

Jacques was amused. "He's looking at me exactly as he'd look at an apple in a bowl," he thought. "What a nuisance having that article to finish!"

When Paterson had shyly asked his leave to paint this portrait, Jacques had not dared say "No." For months the painter, too hard up to hire a model and incapable of getting through a day without plying his brush, had had to exercise his talent on makeshift still-lifes. Paterson had said: "Four or five sittings at most," but this Sunday morning was the ninth time that Jacques, inwardly chafing at the imposition, had forced himself to trudge uphill to the highest point of the Old Town and hold a pose that never lasted less than two hours.

Paterson had begun dabbing his brush feverishly on the palette. Once more, flexing his knees like a diver testing a springboard, he paused for a moment, stock-still, his birdlike eyes intent on Jacques. Suddenly his arm shot forward like a fencer's, to plant a speck of white on a precise spot of the canvas. That done, he backed once more to the wall, wagging his head, screwing up his eyes, and snorting like an angry lapdog. At last, with a smile, he turned toward his victim.

"There's such … such forcefulness, you know, in those eyebrows of yours, your temples, the way your hair sticks up! Sorry, old chap, but it's got me absolutely beat!"

After depositing his brushes and palette in the sink, he swung nimbly round, crossed the room, and plumped down on one of the mattresses.

"That's enough for today."

Jacques heaved a sigh of relief. "Can I have a look? Yes? Why, you've made a lot of headway this sitting!"

It was a three-quarter-length portrait, ending at the knees, and showed Jacques seated, his left shoulder receding in perspective, his right shoulder, arm, and elbow advancing boldly into the foreground. His sinewy hand, splayed on his thigh, made an effective highlight near the bottom of the picture. His head, though he was looking up toward the light—which came from the left—drooped a little over the left shoulder, as if weighed down by the thick mass of hair and the spacious brow. Half the face was in shadow, but, owing to the slant of the head, the whole forehead was bathed in sunlight. The dark lock, shot with ruddy gleams, that traversed it from left to right brought out by contrast the luminosity of the skin. The artist had been particularly successful in getting onto his canvas the texture of the hair that came down, in a stiff, serried growth, low on the forehead. The white shirt was open at the collar, and the heavy under-jaw rested on it. Though the drawing of the lips was faulty, the bitter, tormented line of the large mouth gave a savage grandeur to the face. Under the rugged brows the eyes were half submerged in shadow, but their expression was as frank and forthright as could be desired; indeed the artist had overdone this quality: there was a certain effrontery in the gaze that was unlike Jacques. Paterson had just become aware of this. On the whole, he had successfully brought out the impression of massive strength conveyed by forehead, shoulders, and chin; but he had lost hope of contriving to suggest the moods of melancholy, pensiveness, and boldness that flickered successively, near intermingling, in Jacques's eyes.

"You'll be coming again tomorrow, won't you?"

"Suppose I'll have to!" Jacques assented gloomily.

Paterson had risen and was feeling in the pockets of a raincoat hanging above the bed. He broke into a merry laugh.

"Mithoerg's a wily bird! He never leaves any tobacco in his pockets nowadays."

When Paterson laughed he seemed once more the mischievous youngster he had doubtless been five or six years earlier, when he had broken with his puritanical family and run away from Oxford to go and live in Switzerland.

"No luck!" He grinned. "I'd have liked to offer you a cigarette for a Sunday treat!"

He could do without food more easily than without tobacco, more easily without tobacco than without paints. In any case, he was rarely out of paints, or tobacco, or food, for long.

He and his friends formed part of a large group of revolutionary youth, all more or less penniless, who had flocked to Geneva and were vaguely affiliated with the recognized organizations. Somehow they survived—though how they managed it was a mystery. A favoured few, the intellectuals like Jacques, wrote for newspapers and magazines. Others, trained workers from different parts of the world—typesetters, draughtsman, watchmakers, and the like—had more or less regular employment and shared their earnings with their unemployed comrades. But most had no fixed work, and took whatever came their way —obscure, ill-paid jobs, which they dropped the moment they had a little money in their pockets. There were a good many students among them, young men with frayed cuffs and collars, who kept themselves alive by tutoring, research work in libraries, or menial tasks in laboratories. Luckily they were never all destitute at the same moment. There was always someone with a well-lined purse to treat the others, roaming the streets with empty pockets, to a hunk of bread, a sausage, a cup of coffee, and a pack of cigarettes. Such mutual aid was furnished as a matter of course. A man can get used to eating only once a day—and a scratch meal at that—when he is young and lives in fellowship with others, sharing their interests, convictions, political ideas, and aspirations. Some, like Paterson, humorously vaunted the pangs of an empty stomach, the emptier the better, as inducing a fine frenzy of the brain that could be turned to good account. There was some truth behind the jest. The sparing diet helped to keep up that mental exaltation which gave such zest to the interminable palavers they indulged in at all hours of the day, in public squares, in café, in their lodgings, but, above all, at "Headquarters." This name had been given to the place where they forgathered to exchange the latest news transmitted from abroad by fellow-revolutionaries, to compare experiences and theories, and with fraternal fervour to pool their efforts for building up the New Social Order.

Standing in front of the shaving-mirror, Jacques was putting on his collar and tie.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, old chap?" Paterson lazily inquired. He was sprawling across the bed, half naked, with his arm extended.

Paterson had thin, girlish wrists, but a man's hands; slim ankles, but typical English feet. His head was small; the sunlight gave his pale-gold hair, matted by perspiration, the rich patina of an ancient cameo. In his eyes, a little too translucent to be expressive, naïveté seemed always struggling with distress.

"I'd a lot of things to say to you," he went on languidly. "One thing is that you left Headquarters too early last night."

"I'd had enough of it. They go round and round in a circle, always saying the same things."

"Yes. But the argument took a really exciting turn last night. A pity you weren't there. The Pilot wound up by telling Boissonis off. Oh, only a few words, but the sort of words that give one the shivers, if you know what I mean."

His tone betrayed a rankling antipathy. Jacques had often noticed the hostile admiration the Englishman had for Meynestrel—"the Pilot" as he was usually called—but had never discussed it with him. Personally he was deeply attached to Meynestrel, whom he not only cherished as a friend but revered as a master mind.

He turned briskly. "What words? What did he say?"

Paterson did not reply at once; he was staring at the ceiling with an odd smile on his lips.

"It came at the end, a bolt from the blue. A good many had cleared out by then, like you. He let Boissonis rattle on, with that way he has, you know, of not seeming to listen. Suddenly he bent toward Alfreda, who was sitting at his feet as usual, and said his piece, very quickly, without looking at anyone in particular. Wait a bit! I'll try to remember the exact words… . 'Nietzsche did away with the idea of God, and replaced it by the concept of ideal man. That was nothing much—only a first step forward. It's up to modern atheism to go one better and do away with the concept of ideal man as well.' "

Jacques made an impatient gesture. "Go on! What else did he say?"

"Wait a bit! Boissonis asked: 'And replace it by what?' The Pilot smiled—you know that terrifying smile of his—and rapped out: 'By nothing!' "

Jacques, too, smiled—to avoid having to answer. He felt hot, tired with the long sitting, and eager to get back to his work. He did not in the least wish to embark on a metaphysical discussion with the worthy Paterson. He ceased smiling and merely said: "One thing is certain, Pat; the Pilot's one of the most noble-minded men."

Propping himself on an elbow, the Englishman looked Jacques in the eyes.

" 'By nothing!' An absolutely monstrous thing to say. Don't you agree?"

As Jacques made no reply, Paterson let himself sink back onto the mattress.

"I'm always wondering, old chap, what sort of life the Pilot can have led. To reach that stage of—of desiccation, he must have had a damnably hard row to hoe, have breathed a pretty noxious air. By the way, Thibault," he went on almost at once and in exactly the same tone, but fixing his eyes intently on Jacques, "there's something I've been wanting for ages to ask you, as you know both of them so well. Do you think Alfreda's happy with her Pilot?"

It struck Jacques that he had never put that question to himself. On the face of it, the question was natural enough. But to answer it would be venturing on delicate ground, from which some obscure instinct warned him off under the present circumstances. With a prudently evasive shrug of his shoulders he went on knotting his tie.

Paterson did not seem put out by his silence, and was lying down again.

"Are you coming to Janotte's lecture tonight?" he asked.

Jacques welcomed the change of subject. "I'm not sure. I've a job to finish off for the *Beacon*. If it goes smoothly, I'll be at Headquarters at about six." He had put his hat on. "Perhaps I'll see you there then. So long, Pat!"

Paterson sat up. "You haven't answered me about Alfreda."

Jacques had opened the door. He turned back and after a slight hesitation replied: "I really don't know… . But why shouldn't she be happy?"

# Chapter II

HALF-PAST one had struck and all Geneva was lingering still over its Sunday dinner. Sunlight fell sheer upon the Bourg-du-Four Square, shadowless but for a purplish-black rim around the houses.

As Jacques crossed the deserted square, only the ripple of the fountain fretted the silence. He walked quickly, with his head down, sunbeams beating on the nape of his neck, his eyes seared by the shimmering asphalt. Though he had no great fear of the midsummer heat at Geneva—a blue-and-white effulgence, implacable yet healthy, seldom overpowering—he was glad to discover some patches of shade as he walked by the street-stalls in the narrow Rue de la Fontaine.

He was thinking out his article, a review, several pages long, of Fritsch's latest work, which was to appear in the "New Books" section of the *Beacon*. He had completed two-thirds of it, but the opening page would need to be entirely rewritten. It might be a good idea, he reflected, to begin with the passage from Lamartine that he had copied out two days previously in the public library: "There are two kinds of patriotism. One consists of all the malice, all the prejudices, and all the stupid enmities that nations, gulled by governments whose interest it is to keep them estranged, foster, each for each. There is another and very different patriotism, comprising all the verities and all the rights that nations share in common." The idea behind the words was sound and generous enough, but Jacques could not help smiling at the terms in which it was expressed. "The revolutionary jargon of 1848, presumably. But, really, our vocabulary nowadays is very much the same. There are exceptions," he reminded himself at once. "Those aren't by any means the words the Pilot would have used." The thought of Meynestrel switched his mind back to Paterson's inquiry. Was Alfreda happy? A question he hardly dared to answer one way or the other. Can one ever be sure, he wondered, where women are concerned? Puzzling creatures, women! His experience with Sophia Kammerzinn crossed his mind. Since he had left her father's *pension* at Lausanne, he had rarely given her a thought. In the first months she had made several trips to Geneva to see him. Then she had ceased coming. Still, he had always given her a cordial welcome. Perhaps she had ended by understanding that he had no particular attachment for her. A vague regret came over him. A queer girl, Sophia. He had not replaced her.

He quickened his pace. It was a longish walk to the Place Grenus where he was staying, on the far side of the Rhône, in a poor district all alleyways and slums. Tucked away in a corner of the square, the centre of which was occupied by a public urinal, was the Hotel du Globe, a decrepit three-story building. Above the low entrance-door, in the guise of signboard, hung a glass terrestrial globe, which was illuminated at night. Unlike the other hotels in that part of the town, it did not harbour prostitutes. The hotel was managed by two bachelors, Socialists of long standing, the Vercellini brothers. Almost all the rooms were rented to party militants, who paid little and only when in funds. Never had the Vercellinis turned a lodger out for failing to pay his bill. On occasion, however, they had ejected suspects, for all sorts of queer customers, the worst and the best of men, flocked to their hotel.

Jacques lived on the top floor; the room was cramped but clean. Unfortunately its only window gave onto the landing, and if it was left open all the sounds and smells pouring up the stairs forced their way in. The only way of working in reasonable comfort was to keep the window shut and turn on the electric light. The furniture consisted of a narrow bed, a basin clamped to the wall, a wardrobe, a table, and one chair. The table was small and always crowded, so when he wrote Jacques usually sat on the bed, with an atlas on his knees doing duty for a desk.

He had been working for half an hour when three light taps, spaced at regular intervals, sounded on the door.

"Come in!" he called.

A roguish little face with a mop of unkempt hair peeped in. It was Vanheede, the albino. He, too, had left Lausanne the previous year, at the same time as Jacques, and was living in the Hotel du Globe.

"Sorry, Baulthy—am I disturbing you?" He was one of the few who still called Jacques by his former *nom de plume*, though since his father's death Jacques had taken to signing his articles under his real name. "I saw Monier at the Café Landolt," he said. "The Pilot had given him two messages for you. Number one, that he wants to see you and will stay in for you till five; number two, that your article won't appear in this week's *Beacon*, so you've no need to hand it in tonight."

Jacques laid his hands flat on the sheets of paper in front of him, and leaned back against the wall.

"That's a blessing!" Jacques sounded relieved. But then it struck him this meant waiting till next week for the twenty-five francs he had been counting on, and funds were low.

Smiling, Vanheede went up to the bed. "Wasn't it going well? What's your article about?"

"About Fritsch's book on internationalism."

"What's the trouble?"

"Well, I can't make up my mind what to think of it."

"Of the book?"

"Of the book—and internationalism."

Vanheede's eyebrows, pale to a point near invisibility, knitted.

"Fritsch," Jacques went on, "is a doctrinaire. What's more, he seems to me to lump together things that are distinct and of quite different value: the ideas of nationality, of the state, and of a patria—a fatherland. And that gives one an impression he's on the wrong tack, even when he says things that sound quite sensible."

Vanheede listened with a slight frown. His eyes were hidden by the hueless lashes, and the corners of his mouth drooped in a pout. Backing to the table, he swept to one side some of the books, files, and toilet articles, and perched himself on it.

Jacques went on, in an uncertain tone: "For Fritsch and men like him the internationalist ideal means first of all sweeping away the notion of a fatherland. Is that necessary, or inevitable? I'm not so sure of it."

Vanheede raised his doll-like hand.

"Anyhow, patriotism's got to go. How can one imagine the revolution cramped within the frontiers of a single country? The real revolution, ours, is a world-wide affair. Its got to be brought off everywhere at once, by all the working-class majorities throughout the world."

"Yes. But don't you see that you too are making a distinction between patriotism and the feeling that one has a native land?"

Vanheede emphatically shook his little head, crowned with a tuft of curly, almost silver hair.

"No, they're the same thing, Baulthy. Just see the way the nineteenth century went about it. By everywhere exalting patriotism, the feeling that a man has for his own country and for no other, it fortified the notion of nationalistic states; it spread hatred among nations and paved the way to war."

"Certainly. Yet it wasn't the patriots but the nationalists of the nineteenth century who gave a wrong twist to the idea of a fatherland. For a harmless, sentimental, and, to my mind, quite proper affection, they substituted a cult, an aggressive fanaticism. There's no question we should condemn that sort of nationalism. But need we follow Fritsch in condemning in the same breath every feeling one has for one's own country—a very human, innate, almost physical attachment?"

"Yes! To be a true revolutionary one must cut loose from every attachment; root out of one's personality-"

"Wait a bit!" Jacques broke in. "You're thinking of the thoroughgoing revolutionary—the kind you aspire to be. And you're losing sight of the ordinary man, shaped as he is by nature, by life, by the realities of experience. In any case, is it really feasible to do away with that sentimental patriotism of which I spoke? I'm not so sure of it. A man can try his best to root it out, but he belongs to a certain environment, he was born with a certain temperament, an ethnical complexion, so to speak. He clings to his customs, to the mannerisms of the culture which has shaped him. Wherever he is, he keeps his language. And mind you, that's a very important point. I shouldn't be surprised if the problem of nationality is, in the last analysis, a question of language. Wherever he may be, at home or abroad, a man goes on thinking in the words and syntax of his country. Just see how it is here! Look at our friends in Geneva, all these voluntary expatriates who sincerely believe they've shaken off the dust of their native lands and form a truly international group. You'll see them instinctively forgathering, grouping themselves in little clans—Italian, Russian, Austrian, and so on. Tribal, fraternal—yes, patriotic clans! Why, even you, Vanheede, cling to your fellow-Belgians!"

The albino gave a start, and his owl-like eyes flashed a reproachful glance at Jacques before vanishing once more behind the long eyelashes. His physical uncomeliness made the humility of his manner seem still more pronounced. But his silences served him above all to safeguard his faith, which was stronger than his intellect and marvellously self-assured for all his seeming shyness. No one, not even Jacques, not even the Pilot, had any real influence over Vanheede.

"No," Jacques continued, "a man may expatriate himself, but he can't *de*patriate himself. And in that sort of patriotism there's nothing fundamentally opposed to our ideal of revolutionary internationalism. That's why I wonder if it isn't unwise to attack, as Fritsch does, such sentiments, which, when all is said and done, stand for something human and vital in their way. I even wonder if it wouldn't be injurious to the coming race if they were eliminated." He was silent for a few moments; when he spoke again, he sounded uncertain, perplexed by scruples. "That's what I think, yet I daren't write it. Especially in a short article on Fritsch's work. A whole book would be needed, to make sure of not being misunderstood." Again he fell silent; then suddenly exclaimed: "Anyhow, I shan't write that book! For, really, I'm not sure of my ground. Human beings adapt themselves, and perhaps we can't rule out the feasibility of 'depatriating' man; he might get reconciled to being countryless."

Vanheede slipped off the table and took a quick step toward Jacques, a look of angelic joy transfiguring the face that normally was blank as a blind man's. "But just think of the compensations he would have!" he exclaimed.

Jacques smiled. It was such sudden ecstasies as this that endeared the little Belgian to him.

"And now I'm off!"

Still smiling, Jacques watched Vanheede hop sparrowlike toward the door and make a soundless exit with a shy wave of his tiny hand.

Though it was no longer necessary for him to finish off his article—perhaps, indeed, for that very reason—he settled down again to it with zest. He was still writing when he heard the hall-clock strike four. Meynestrel was expecting him. He jumped off the bed. No sooner was he on his feet than he felt he was famished. But there would be no time to stop for a meal on the way. He remembered that in one of his drawers there were two packets of powdered chocolate instantly soluble in hot water, and that he had refilled his alcohol-lamp the day before. Before he had finished washing his face and hands, the water in his little saucepan was at the boil. After gulping down a cup of scalding-hot chocolate, he hurried out.

# Chapter III

MEYNESTREL lived at a considerable distance from the Place Grenus, in the Carouge district, a rather dreary suburb on the banks of the Arve, where many revolutionaries, mostly Russian refugees, had settled. Wood and coal merchants, dealers in scrap-iron, coach-builders, parquet-makers, monumental masons—all such as needed elbow-room for their businesses—had set up in this district of Geneva. Along the wide streets, sheds and workyards alternated with blocks of ancient houses, mutilated gardens, and building-sites for sale.

The house in which the Pilot lodged was at the corner of the Quai Charles-Page and the Rue de Carouge, facing the Pont Neuf. It was a long, three-story building, flat-fronted, without balconies, weathered a dingy yellow which, however, under the summer sun took on the warm tones of Italian rough-cast. Flights of gulls sped past the windows, wheeling and swooping down toward the Arve, which here ran swift and shallow, boisterous as a mountain torrent, flecking with foam the rocks that jutted just above the surface.

Meynestrel and Alfreda had a two-room flat at the end of a long passage. The rooms were separated by a narrow hall, the smaller being used as a kitchen, the larger as their bedroom and study.

Near the window, in sunlight filtering between the slats of the drawn Venetian blind, Meynestrel was sitting at a light table, working as he waited for Jacques to come. In his uneven, microscopic script, bristling with abbreviations, he was dashing down on sheets of thin notepaper brief phrases, which it was Alfreda's task to decipher and copy on an antiquated typewriter.

For the moment, however, the Pilot was by himself; Alfreda had just left the low chair close beside Meynestrel's on which she always sat. She had taken advantage of a break in her master's work to run to the kitchen and turn on the water tap, and was standing by for a carafe to fill when the water began running cold. An acrid odour of stewed peaches simmering over a slow fire on the gas stove pervaded the warm air. They lived almost entirely on milk foods, vegetables, and cooked fruit.

"Freda!"

She rinsed out the percolator she was holding, set it to drain off, and hastily dried her hands.

"Freda!"

"Coming!"

She hurried to his side and settled down again on the low chair.

"Where have you been, little girl?" Gently Meynestrel patted the bowed, dusky head beside him. The question called for no answer. He had put it in an absent-minded tone, without ceasing to scribble away.

She looked up at him with a smile, her dark eyes glowing with calm loyalty. The widely dilated pupils conveyed her yearning to see, to understand, to love wholeheartedly; yet in them was not the least spark of curiosity or of insistence. She seemed born to watch serenely, to sit and wait. No sooner did Meynestrel begin, for her benefit, to think aloud (it was a habit with him) than she turned toward him, seeming to be listening with her eyes. Sometimes when the thought took a subtle turn, a flutter of her lashes showed her appreciation. All that Meynestrel got from her was this silent, constantly attentive nearness—but it had now become as necessary to him as the air he breathed.

She was only twenty-two, fifteen years younger than he. No one had any clear idea of how they had chanced to meet, or of the real bond uniting them under the tranquil surface of their life in common. They had come together to Geneva during the previous year. Meynestrel was Swiss. Alfreda, though she never mentioned her family or early years, was known to hail from South America.

Meynestrel went on scribbling, his slender head, which the short, pointed beard caused to seem longer still, bent above his task. The light fell full on the narrow forehead, which gave an impression of being pinched in at the temples. His left hand was fondling the nape of Alfreda's neck. Placidly leaning forward, the girl accepted the caress with the vibrant immobility of a petted cat.

Without shifting his hand Meynestrel stopped writing, gazed vaguely in front of him, and shook his head thoughtfully.

"Danton once said: 'We want to put on top what is below, and put below what's now on top.' That, little girl, is a politician's slogan, not a revolutionary Socialist's. I'm sure Louis Blanc, Proudhon, Fourier, or Marx would never have said a thing like that."

She looked up at him. But his eyes were not bent on her. His face, raised now toward the upper part of the window where a sunbeam filtered through a chink in the Venetian blind, was quite expressionless. The features were regular, but curiously devoid of life. Though not unhealthy, his complexion was a neutral grey, as if the blood under the skin were colourless. Beneath the close-cropped moustache, the lips were of exactly the same hue as the cheeks. All the man's vitality was concentrated in the eyes, small, oddly close-set eyes. The jet-black pupils filled the space between the eyelids, the whites being scarcely visible. Their glow was so intense as to be hardly bearable, yet no warmth emanated from them. There was something almost feral in the eyes, deep pools of light never ruffled by the least hint of emotion, and in the look of imperturbable attention which at once captivated and annoyed its victim. One was reminded of the keen, ruthless, baffling stare of certain breeds of monkeys.

"Yes, the syllogisms of individualist ideology," he muttered in a breath, as if rounding off an unspoken phrase.

His voice was even, with no force behind it. He almost always spoke in curt, cryptic phrases, which seemed to shoot forth from his lips, impelled by a scant but never-failing supply of breath. His way of uttering such slippery combinations of big words as "syllogisms of individualist ideology" in a single breath, yet with every syllable distinct, seemed a feat of virtuosity like that of the violinist who with one sweep of his bow releases a cascade of semiquavers.

"Socialism that takes account of classes," he went on, "isn't true socialism. To turn the social order upside down is merely to replace one bad thing by another, one oppression by another. All classes are suffering today. The tyranny of competition, of capitalist exploitation—in a word, individualism run amuck—presses quite as heavily on the employer of labour. Only, he doesn't seem to see that." Twice he coughed slightly and pressed his hand to his chest. A rush of words followed: "To reorganize production and combine all the healthy elements of the community, without discrimination, in a classless society, that's the task before us, little girl."

Then he fell to writing again.

Meynestrel's name was linked with the early days of aviation. As a mechanical engineer and pilot, he had been called on to join the staff of the S.A.S. when their aircraft factory was set up at Zürich, and several aeronautical gadgets still in use bore his name. During

that period a series of attempts to fly the Alps had brought him into the public eye. But a serious accident in which he all but lost his life, during the Zurich-Turin flight, had left him with an injured leg, and he had been obliged to give up flying. Later, when strikes had broken out at the S.A.S. factory, he had deliberately abandoned his post in the company's office to join in with the workers; thereafter he had vanished abruptly from Switzerland.

As to his subsequent movements nothing definite was known. He may have spent the intervening years in Eastern Europe, for he was well up on Russian problems and, on several occasions, had displayed a knowledge of Slavonic dialects. But he was equally well up on Spanish affairs and those of Asia Minor. One thing was clear: he had been in close touch with most of the then leaders of the revolutionary movement in Europe, and still corresponded regularly with several of them. No one knew in what circumstances or with what object he had approached them. He spoke of them in puzzling terms—a blend of vagueness and precision—and always with reference to some other topic, to contribute a piece of timely information when generalities were being discussed. On the occasions when he quoted some characteristic remark that presumably he had heard, or described an event that seemingly he had witnessed, he never troubled to explain his part in the interview or incident. His allusions were always casual; whether he spoke of facts, political theories, or personalities, he always sounded well informed and earnest, but whenever his personal experience was mooted he evaded the subject, sometimes with a joke.

The fact remains that he gave an impression of having always been on the spot when something memorable was happening, or, anyhow, of knowing better than anyone else exactly what took place on that particular occasion. Moreover, he seemed to have observed each such event from a special angle, enabling him to draw conclusions from it as cogent as they were surprising.

Asked one day why he had come to Geneva, he had replied: "To have some peace." During his first months in that city he had kept severely to himself, avoiding alike refugees and Swiss members of the "Party" —with Alfreda as his sole companion. Meanwhile he read widely, and analysed the writings of the great revolutionaries—with the object apparently of mastering the tactics of revolution.

Then one day Richardley, a young Genevan militant, had persuaded him to come to Headquarters, the nightly meeting-place of a mixed group of Swiss and foreign revolutionaries. It would have been hard to say if he really liked the group; he had never expressed an opinion on the subject. Still, he came there again, of his own accord, on the next evening. And very soon his striking personality had made itself appreciated. In that fraternity of theorists, obliged for the time being to content themselves with words instead of deeds, the shrewdness of Meynestrel's critical judgments, his unfailing competence (which seemed the outcome rather of experience than of mere study or research), his instinct for bringing each problem down to the level of hard facts and always giving revolutionary theory a practical twist, his gift for laying his finger on the crucial point of the most tangled social problems and summing it up in a few pithy sentences—all these qualities had given him a unique prestige among his associates at Headquarters. Within a few months he had become the focus, the driving force of the group; some would have said "the Leader."

Daily he came there, but the mystery in which he wrapped himself remained impervious: the enigma of a man who is taking his bearings, holding himself in, biding his time.

"Come in here," Alfreda said, and showed Jacques into the kitchen. "He's working."

Jacques mopped his perspiring brow.

"A glass of water?" she suggested, pointing to the carafe standing in the sink under a trickle of cold water from the tap.

"Rather!"

The glass she filled became misted at once. With the carafe in her hand she stood before him in that attitude of humble service which was so characteristic of her. Her sallow, lightly powdered skin, her snub nose, the childish mouth that swelled like a ripe strawberry when she closed her lips, her eyes slightly drawn up toward the temples, and the black, stiff, lustrous fringe that draped her forehead almost to the eyebrows, gave her the look of a Japanese doll made in Europe. Perhaps, Jacques mused, that blue kimono adds to the effect. And, as he drank the water, Pat's question came back to his mind. Was Alfreda happy with her Pilot? He had to confess he hardly knew her, though she was always present at his talks with Meynestrel. He had got into the habit of regarding her less as a living being than as a domestic adjunct—more precisely an apanage of Meynestrel. For the first time he grew conscious of the slight constraint he always felt when alone with Alfreda.

"Another glass?"

"Thanks very much."

That cup of chocolate had made him thirsty. It struck him that he had had no lunch, that it was absurd the way he played fast and loose with his meals. Suddenly a fantastic question crossed his mind: "Did I put out my alcohol-lamp?" Rack his memory as he might, nothing definite was forthcoming.

The Pilot's voice echoed across the little flat.

"Freda!"

"Coming!"

Smiling, her eyes twinkling with amusement, she shot a meaning glance at Jacques that seemed to say: "You see what a spoilt child my Pilot is!"

"Come with me," she said.

They found Meynestrel standing at the window, outlined against the light. He had raised the blind a little and sunlight fell on the large, low bed, bare walls, and the table, on which lay only a fountain-pen and a little mound of notepaper.

In his grey pyjamas Meynestrel seemed tall. He was sparely built and rather narrow-chested, and his shoulders had a slight droop. His keen eyes bored into Jacques's as he held out his hand.

"Sorry to drag you all this way, but we'll be quieter here than at the Talking Shop… . Here's some work for you, little girl," he added, handing Alfreda a book with a marker showing the place.

Docilely she took her typewriter, squatted on the floor with her back against the bed, and began strumming the keys.

As Meynestrel and Jacques sat down at the table, an anxious look settled on the Pilot's face. Leaning back in his chair, he stretched his right leg straight in front of him. His flying accident had left a stiffness in the knee which sometimes gave him a slight limp.

"Here's a nasty business!" he began. "Some 'person unknown' has sent me a letter. There are two men, it seems, whom we should beware of. Firstly, Guittberg."

"What! Guittberg?" Jacques exclaimed.

"Secondly, Tobler."

Jacques made no movement.

"Does that surprise you?" the Pilot asked.

"About Guittberg—yes."

"Here's the letter." Meynestrel took an envelope from his pyjama pocket. "Read it!"

"Hm," Jacques murmured after composedly perusing the letter, a long, methodical indictment—unsigned.

"You know the important part played by Guittberg and Tobler in the Croatian movement. They'll be coming to Vienna for the Congress. So we must ascertain how far they're to be trusted. I don't want to pass the word round before making sure."

"Yes," Jacques said. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask: "What do you propose to do?" but he refrained. Though he was on easy terms with Meynestrel, instinct warned him not to go beyond a certain point.

As if he had expected the question, Meynestrel went on.

"Firstly"—he had intense concern, almost a mania, for making himself clear, and often began his phrases with a crisp, emphatic "Firstly," not invariably followed by a "Secondly"—"firstly, there's only one way of getting at the truth, and that's to make investigations on the spot. In Vienna. A discreet inquiry, made by someone who doesn't attract attention. Preferably someone whose name isn't on the rolls of any party. But"—his gaze settled fixedly on Jacques—"someone we can trust. I mean, someone whose common sense we can rely on."

"Yes." Jacques was surprised, and secretly flattered. Promptly came the not unpleasant afterthought: "No more sittings for Pat. Hard luck for him, but it can't be helped!" Then, for the second time, his thoughts harked back to the alcohol-lamp.

In the ensuing silence the only sounds were the clicking of the typewriter and, like the murmur of a distant stream, the trickle of the water overflowing from the carafe into the sink.

"Will you undertake it?" Meynestrel asked.

Jacques's answer was a quick nod.

"You must leave in two days. Time enough to get together the relevant documents. And stay in Vienna as long as is needed. A fortnight, if necessary."

Alfreda shot a quick upward glance at Jacques, who gave another nod; then she bent over her work again.

"In Vienna," Meynestrel went on, "you'll have Hosmer's help." He stopped abruptly; there had been a knock at the front door. "Go and see, little girl." He turned to Jacques again. "Hosmer should know something about it."

Hosmer, an Austrian living in Vienna, was a friend of Meynestrel. Jacques had met him a year before at Lausanne, where Hosmer had stayed a few days. The encounter had left a deep impression on him. It was the first time he had come across that type of revolutionary—hard-bitten, cynical, without scruples as to the means employed, and interested only in results, prepared quite shamelessly to sail under false colours when occasion called for it, provided that expedient served, in however small degree, the revolutionary cause.

Alfreda came back. "It's Mithoerg."

Meynestrel turned to Jacques, and said in a low voice: "We'll go into it together this evening at the Talking Shop," adding in a louder tone: "Come in, Mithoerg."

Mithoerg wore large round glasses which, looming below the half-moons of his heavy eyebrows, gave him a permanently startled air. His face was plump and rather flabby, with the puffy cheeks of a man who has not been able to sleep off the effects of a convivial night.

Meynestrel had risen from his seat.

"What brings you here, Mithoerg?"

Mithoerg's gaze swept the room, resting on the Pilot, then on Jacques, then on Alfreda.

"I come to say that old Janotte, he's come to Headquarters," he explained laboriously. He was never quite at ease in any language but his own, which was German.

No, Jacques was thinking. I can't be sure if I blew that lamp out. After filling my cup, I may have put back the saucepan on the lamp and left it burning. I drank my chocolate and went out. Yes, it may have been still alight then… . He stared at the others, without speaking.

"Janotte particularly wanted to see you before his lecture tonight," Mithoerg was saying. "But he's so worn by the journey. Heat always lays him down."

"Too much mane!" Alfreda chuckled to herself.

"So he's gone off for a little nap. But he asked me to bring you his best greeting."

"That was very, very nice of him." Meynestrel's voice rose to an unexpected falsetto. "Only, Mithoerg, my boy, we don't give a tinker's damn for your friend Janotte. Do we, little girl?" While speaking, he had rested his arm on Alfreda's shoulder, and was stroking her hair.

"Do you know him?" Alfreda cast a mischievous glance in Jacques's direction.

Jacques did not hear. He was vainly groping in his memory for some reassuring detail. He was fairly sure of having placed the saucepan on the floor, in which case he must have blown out the flame and replaced the cap. Had he, though …?

"He has a mane like an old lion," Alfreda laughed. "He's a leader of the anti-clericals, and to look at him you'd take him for a cathedral organist."

"Sh, little girl," Meynestrel scolded indulgently.

Taken aback, Mithoerg gave a sickly smile. His bristling shock of hair made him seem always on the brink of flying into a rage—as indeed he was extremely apt to do.

He was an Austrian by birth. Five years earlier, to escape his period of military service, he had fled from Salzburg, where he was studying chemistry. He had settled down in Switzerland, first at Lausanne, then at Geneva, had there completed his course of studies, and was now working four days a week in a laboratory. But he was more interested in sociology than in chemistry. Gifted with a prodigious memory, he had read everything and forgotten nothing, and each detail was neatly pigeonholed in his square head. His

friends, especially Meynestrel, consulted him as they would consult an encyclopaedia. He was an exponent of the school of violence, yet the man himself was softhearted, sentimental, timid, and unhappy.

"Janotte, he has trotted this lecture of his all round the Continent." His tone was bland, unruffled. "A great authority is he on European affairs. Just now he comes from Milan. Two days he spent in Austria, with Trotsky. He has some curious stories to tell. It's our plan to get him to come round to the Café Landolt, after the lecture, and start him telling them. You will come, won't you?" He glanced at Meynestrel, then at Alfreda. "How about you, Jacques?" he added, turning to the young man.

"Yes," Jacques said, "I may drop in at the Landolt. But the lecture—no!" His obsession had rattled his nerves and though he had long discarded any religious belief, the anti-clerical attitude in others almost always irritated him. "There's something childishly aggressive in the mere title of the lecture—'Disproofs of God's Existence.' " He took from his pocket a green handbill. "You've only to look at his manifesto!" he exclaimed with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

"Listen! 'I propose to submit to you a theory of the universe which definitely rules out all recourse to the theory of a Divine Purpose!' "

"It's easy to make jokes about his style," Mithoerg broke in, rolling his eyes indignantly. When he became excited, his salivary glands secreted copiously, and he seemed to hiss the words out. "I quite agree these things might be better put, from a philosophic viewpoint. But I don't think it useless to resay them, again and again. For truly it is by superstition that the clergy for years and years have kept their hold on men. Without religion, men would not have so long been putting up with poverty. They would have revolted long, long ago. And freed themselves."

"Very likely," Jacques admitted, as he rolled the leaflet into a ball and tossed it gaily through a chink in the blind. "And it's quite likely that a harangue on those lines will get as much applause here as at Vienna or Milan. What's more, I realize there's something rather touching in all this eagerness to understand, to clear the mind of cobwebs, which brings hundreds of men and women together, in a hot, stuffy room reeking with smoke, when they'd be ever so much better off sitting on the shore of the lake, looking up at the stars. But personally I simply can't face it—spending my evening listening to that stuff."

On the last words his voice had suddenly faltered; he had just pictured the papers on his table writhing as they caught fire, the window curtains going up in flames—so vividly that his breath failed him. Meynestrel, Alfreda, even Mithoerg—not a particularly observant man—stared at him in surprise.

"I'm off. *Au revoir*," he said curtly.

"Aren't you coming with us to Headquarters?" Meynestrel asked.

"Got to go home first!" He jerked the words out over his shoulder.

In the Rue de Carouge he broke into a run. At Plaimpalais Circus a tram was pulling out; he jumped onto it. But when it halted at the quay, impatience got the better of him; hastily alighting, he made for the bridge at the double.

Not till he was coming out of the Rue des Etuves and a familiar scene lay before him—the little square with the urinal in its midst, and in a corner the Hôtel du Globe, placid as ever—did his panic terror vanish as if by magic.

"What a fool I am!" he thought.

Now it came back to him that he had replaced the brass extinguisher on the wick, had even burned his fingers doing so. He could still feel the ball of his thumb smarting and, glancing at it, saw the mark of the burn. And now his memory was so precise, so unquestionable, that he did not even trouble to climb the three flights of stairs to verify it. Turning on his heel, he walked back toward the Rhône.

From the bridge he saw the Old Town serenely rising tier by tier from a green mass of foliage on the water's edge up to the Saint-Pierre spires fretting the blue immensity of the Alps. "What a fool I am!" he murmured once more. The disproportion between the trivial incident and the anxiety it had caused him passed his understanding. It was not the first time, either, that he had thus been plagued by his imagination. "How is it," he wondered, "that at such moments I so utterly lose control of myself? The way I can give in to anxiety is fantastic, positively morbid. And not only to anxiety, to scruples as well… ."

Panting, perspiring, he climbed with halting steps and unseeing eyes the little streets he knew so well: dark, cool alleys—lined with old houses and small, timbered shops, broken by flights of steps and terraces—that wound their upward way to the city proper.

He had entered the Rue Calvin, without noticing where he was going. A sombre, solemn street well suited to its name, it followed the crestline of the slope. The rows of stately grey-stone houses, the austere lives that were presumably being led behind those lofty windows—all contributed to an impression of puritanism at its wealthiest, and gloomiest. But at the far end of this bleak vista, with a saving grace, rose the pillars and façade of the Place Saint-Pierre, gay with sunlight and the verdure of its immemorial lime trees.

# Chapter IV

"IT'S Sunday," Jacques said to himself, observing the crowd of women and children in the Cathedral Square. "Sunday, June 28. This Austrian investigation may well last ten days or a fortnight; and there's heaps remaining to be done before the Congress… ."

Like all his comrades in that summer of 1914, he had high hopes of the resolutions touching the major problems of the Socialist International that would be passed at the Vienna Socialist Congress called for August 23.

Jacques looked forward to the special mission on which the Pilot had dispatched him. He liked activity; it enabled him to think well of himself, without remorse. Moreover, he was not sorry to get away for a few days from the perpetual confabulations and parlour politics of Geneva.

While he was there he could not refrain from going practically every evening to Headquarters. Sometimes he merely dropped in, shook hands with some friends, and left at once. On other occasions, after drifting from group to group, he retired to the back room with Meynestrel. Those he esteemed his lucky evenings; brief, cherished hours of an intimacy that made him greatly envied. For men who had to their credit a fighting record, who had "done their bit" on the revolutionary front, could not understand why the Pilot preferred Jacques's company to theirs.

Usually, however, Jacques stayed among his friends, silent, somewhat aloof, and rarely taking part in their discussions. On the occasions when he did take part he displayed a breadth of view, a desire for mutual understanding and conciliation, and a mental outlook which promptly gave an unwonted turn to the conversation.

In that little cosmopolitan circle, as in all similar circles, he encountered two types of revolutionary: the "apostles" and the "experts."

Temperamentally he was drawn to men of the former type—whether Socialists, Communists, or anarchists. Spontaneously he felt at home with these generous-minded mystics, whose revolt had the same origin as his: an innate revulsion from injustice. All dreamed, as he dreamed, of building on the ruins of the contemporary world a new world of social justice. Their visions of the future might differ in detail, but they shared in the same hope, the hope of a new order, of liberty, equality, and fraternity, of peace. Like Jacques—and it was particularly this that drew him to them—they were scrupulously loyal to an inner standard of nobility; their aspirations toward a grandiose ideal urged them heroically to surpass themselves. In the last analysis, the revolutionary cause appealed to them because, like Jacques, they found in it a splendid incentive for living. Thus they remained at heart individualists, though they had pledged their lives to the triumph of a collective ideal; and though they might not suspect it, what they most enjoyed in that heady atmosphere of hope and conflict was that each could feel his individual energies and potentialities multiplied a hundredfold, and his personality set free to fulfill itself in the service of a movement infinitely greater than himself.

But his preference for the idealists did not blind Jacques to the fact that, were they left to their sole enthusiasm, they might have gone on agitating indefinitely, without ever making good. The active element, the leaven of the revolutionary movement, was a skilled minority, the experts. It was they who formulated specific grievances and achieved tangible results. Their revolutionary technique, already ample, was being constantly implemented by new experience. They applied their fanaticism to limited ends, graded in the order of their urgency; realistic, not visionary ends. In the atmosphere of high idealism promoted by the apostles, these experts gave practical expression to their faith.

Jacques felt that he did not really fit into either of these categories. Obviously he had more in common with the apostles; yet his lucidity of mind, or, anyhow, his knack of drawing clear distinctions, his shrewd insight into personalities, situations, and the bearing of events, might well, had he applied himself, have qualified him for expert work. Indeed, given favourable conditions, he might have blossomed out into a leader. Was it not that capacity for combining the expert's political gumption with the mystical zeal of the apostle that characterized the revolutionary leaders? He had met some of them and found in all a twofold competence: efficiency—or more precisely, an outlook on realities so far-ranging and at the same time so shrewd that, in any given emergency, they could point out at once what steps to take to cope with the situation and control its trend; and, secondly, a personal ascendancy, a magnetic power enabling them automatically to influence other men and, it would almost seem, events as well.

Jacques lacked neither clear-sightedness nor authority; what is more, he had a quite exceptional gift for winning the affection and approval of others. If he had never tried to exploit these qualities, it was because, with very rare exceptions, he felt an instinctive distaste for meddling with the course of others' lives.

He often mused on the peculiarity of his position in this Genevan group; it struck him as very different according as he viewed it in relation to the group collectively or in relation to individuals.

As regards the collectivity his attitude was usually passive. Not passive, however, in the sense that he stood aside from their activities. That, indeed, was what surprised him most. By the force of circumstances he had been led to play a part, a rather thankless part: that of explaining and justifying certain values, certain cultural acquisitions and forms of art and life, which all around him labelled "bourgeois" and condemned as such offhand. Though no less convinced than his companions that the bourgeoisie had outlived its vocation in world-history, he could not bring himself to endorse the systematic, wholesale destruction of that bourgeois culture with which he felt he was still deeply imbued. To the defence of what was best and most enduring in it, he applied a sort of aristocratic, typically French intellectualism that, much as the others resented it, sometimes brought them round, if not to revise their opinions, at least to recast them in a less intolerant form. Perhaps, too, they felt more or less consciously a certain satisfaction at having in their ranks, sharing wholeheartedly in their social ideal, a deserter from the upper middle class. Moreover, the very fact of his being with them was, as it were, a testimony—given by the very world that they were bent on overthrowing—to their theories of the supreme necessity of revolution.

In his relations with individuals, taken separately, Jacques's influence was much more noticeable. At first he had encountered a slight mistrust, but soon he had established a definite moral ascendancy—naturally over the best members of the group. Behind his reticence, behind the distinction of his modes of thought and conduct, they discovered a very human warm-heartedness which melted their reserve and fired their confidence. Nor did they treat Jacques quite as they treated each other—as a mere fellow-member of their

team. They brought to their contacts with him a touch of intimacy, of affection, and made known to him their difficulties and doubts. There were evenings when one or another would unbosom himself to Jacques of his best-guarded secrets: his egoism, his failings, and his moral lapses. In his company they came to a keener understanding of themselves and gained a new lease of energy. They asked his advice as if he had discovered that key to the problems of man's inner life for which he had himself been seeking everywhere all his life through. And in so doing, without suspecting it, they imposed on him a painful self-constraint; by lending his personality and words a greater significance than he would have wished, they obliged him to keep a constant watch over himself, to refrain from speaking out or betraying his perplexities and discouragements.

The responsibility thus forced upon him kept him cruelly to himself, plunging him into an isolation that often made him feel quite desperate. "Why," he asked himself, "is this undeserved prestige foisted on me?" One of the pet notions of his brother Antoine came to his mind: "We're Thibaults and there's something about us Thibaults that compels respect." But it was easy for him to shake off the toils of pride, for he was far too well aware of his own weaknesses to imagine that any mysterious force could emanate from him.

# Chapter V

THE Headquarters, or "Talking Shop" as Meynestrel's intimates usually called it, was discreetly situated in the heart of the upper city, in the old Rue des Barrieres flanking the Cathedral.

Seen from outside, the building gave the impression of being disused. It was one of several ramshackle old houses that had somehow survived in that decorous quarter of the town. The front, three stories high, was plastered a dingy pink; the wall was crannied, pocked with damp-rot, and the dusty, shutterless sash-windows suggested an abandoned tenement-house. Between it and the street was a narrow, walled-in front yard, littered with refuse, scrap-iron, and rubble, among which a large elder tree rose in solitary grace. The entrance-gate had vanished, and a band of metal linked the two stone pillars, bearing in still legible characters the inscription: "Brass Foundry." The foundry had long since been transferred elsewhere, but the premises were still being used as a warehouse by the proprietors.

Behind the empty house there was a second yard, invisible from the street, in which stood the two-story building that was known as Headquarters. The only access to it was through a long, vaulted corridor crossing the former foundry from end to end. The ground floor had been used as stabling in earlier days, and in it Monier, the handyman, now lived. The upper floor consisted of four adjoining rooms opening on a long, dark passage. The smallest of the rooms, at the end of the passage, had been, at the suggestion of Alfreda, set apart as a sort of private office for the Pilot. The others, which were fairly spacious, served as common rooms. In each were ten or a dozen chairs, some benches, and tables strewn with newspapers and magazines. For at Headquarters was available not only the whole Socialist press of Europe but also the majority of those sporadic revolutionary periodicals which, after several successive issues to bring themselves to notice, lapsed into an eclipse that lasted from a few months to years, because funds had run out or their staff was languishing in jail.

No sooner had Jacques emerged from the cloisterlike corridor and entered the back yard than a buzz of heated conversation on the upper floor apprised him that the Talking Shop had a full house that evening.

At the foot of the staircase three men were carrying on an animated discussion in what sounded vaguely like Italian or Spanish. They were three enthusiastic Esperantists, one of whom, Charpentier, a teacher at Lausanne—he had come to Geneva to hear Janotte's speech—was the editor of a review that had some success in revolutionary circles, *L'Espérantiste du Léman*. He never missed an opportunity of declaring that one of the most crying needs of the internationalists was a universal tongue, and that the adoption of Esperanto as a second language by men of every nationality would simplify intercourse between the peoples on the intellectual plane no less than on the material. He was fond of invoking the high authority of Descartes, who in a letter to a friend explicitly preconized a "universal language, very easy to learn, to speak, and to write, and apt—this being the most important thing—to aid the understanding."

After shaking hands with the Esperantists, Jacques went up the stairs. On the landing he found Monier on his knees, busy sorting out on the floor a pile of numbers of *Vorwärts*. Monier was a professional waiter, but though he always wore, in season and out, the low-cut waistcoat and celluloid dicky appropriate to his calling, he rarely followed it. The utmost he did was, for one week every month, to work as an extra hand at a beer-house, thus ensuring three weeks' leisure, all of which he devoted to the "revolutionary cause." He displayed an equal zeal for all and sundry tasks—running errands, cleaning up, sorting out periodicals, and operating the mimeograph.

The door of the room at the top of the stairs stood open. Alfreda and Paterson were by themselves, talking near the window. Jacques had already observed that, when she was with the Englishman, Alfreda seemed to drop her usual role of silent onlooker and blossom out into a young woman with a mind of her own—an aspect of her that, presumably out of shyness, she never revealed in other circumstances. She had Meynestrel's brief-case under her arm and in her hand a pamphlet, a passage from which she was reading out in a low tone to Paterson. Puffing at his pipe, the young man seemed to be listening absent-mindedly. His eyes were studying the bent face with the jet-black fringe and the pale cheeks on which the long lashes cast wavering shadows; he was wondering, perhaps, how the curious dull sheen of that white skin could be realized on canvas. Neither of them noticed Jacques walking past the door.

In the second room he saw a number of familiar faces. Old Boissonis was sitting near the door, his fat paunch sagging over his thighs. Near him stood Mithoerg, Guérin, and Charcovsky, the bookseller.

Boissonis shook Jacques's hand, without interrupting a rejoinder he was making.

"But, in that case … well, what does it prove? The same old story: not enough driving force behind the revolutionary movement. And why? They don't *think* enough." He threw himself back in his chair, his hands splayed on his knees, and grinned aggressively.

Daily he was one of the first-comers. Discussion was the breath of life to him. Sometime professor of natural science at the Bordeaux University, he had been led on from anthropology to sociological research, and, the boldness of his views having got him into bad odour at the university, he had moved to Geneva. What caught the eye in his appearance was the disproportion between his tiny features and his enormous head. The vast, bald, dome-shaped forehead, the heavy jowl, and several layers of chin formed a zone of superfluous fat which seemed to dwarf preposterously all the rest: the eyes sparkling with mischievous good nature; a snub, inquisitive nose with large, gaping nostrils; and fleshy lips always in readiness to smile. All the fat man's vitality seemed concentrated in the small oasis of eyes, nose, and mouth, lost in a Sahara of gross flesh.

"I've said it before, and I say it again," he oracled, licking his plump lips, "we've got to launch our attack, to start with, on the philosophic front."

Mithoerg rolled disapproving eyes behind his glasses, and shook his shaggy mane.

"Thought and action must march hand in hand."

"Look at what happened in Germany in the nineteenth century," Charcovsky began.

Old Boissonis slapped his thighs. "That's just it!" he cried, chuckling already with the satisfaction of having made his point. "Yes, let us take the case of the Germans… ."

Jacques knew in advance everything they were going to say; the only variations would be in the way they bandied arguments and counterarguments, like pawns on a chessboard.

Standing in the middle of the room, Zelavsky, Périnet, Saffrio, and Skada formed an animated quartet. Jacques went up to them.

"Everything hangs together, everything fits in so perfectly, in the capitalist system," declared Zelavsky, a Russian with a long flaxen moustache.

"And zat is vy ve only need to vait, Sergei Pavlovitch," put in Skada, sharply enunciating each word in a tone pitched deliberately low. "Ze bourgeois vorld vill of its own accord crumple into pieces."

Skada, the Levantine Jew, was a man in the early fifties. He was extremely near-sighted, and glasses thick as telescope lenses straddled the putty-coloured hooked nose. The face was an ugly one, with short, fuzzy hair closely plastered over the egg-shaped skull and enormous ears; but the thoughtful eyes glowed with an infinite kindliness.

Skada led an ascetic life. Meynestrel had nicknamed him "the Pundit."

"How's yourself?" a gruff bass voice inquired, and a sledge-hammer hand crashed on Jacques's shoulder. "Hot as hell, ain't it?"

Quilleuf, who had just come in, walked round the room, slapping backs and shaking hands with his hearty "How's yourself?" He never waited for an answer and, in winter as in summer, invariably followed up with "Hot as hell, ain't it?" Nothing short of a raging blizzard could make him change the formula.

"It may take time to crumple," Skada went on, "but crumple it must one day—in-ev-i-ta-bly. Zat's vy one can die vithout regrets." His flabby eyelids dropped and a quiet smile that vouched for his serene confidence in the future set the long, plump lips slowly writhing across each other, like two tangled snakes.

Jean Périnet greeted the Pundit's speech with a series of little, emphatic nods.

"Yes, time's on our side. Everywhere. Even in France."

Périnet had a rapid, high-pitched voice with ringing tones, and a way of saying everything that crossed his mind with artless unconcern. His broad Parisian accent struck an amusing note in these international confabulations. He looked twenty-eight or thirty, a typical young workman from the Parisian suburbs, with alert eyes, the ghost of a moustache, a quizzical nose, and a general air of health and cleanliness. The son of a Paris furniture-maker, he had got into trouble over a woman and run away from home when little more than a boy. He had known hard luck, frequented anarchist circles, and done time in jail. When, as the sequel to a street affray, the Lyon police were on his tracks, he had crossed the frontier. Jacques greatly liked him. The non-French members of the group, however, tended to keep him at arm's length; they were put off by his overready laugh, his caustic wit, and, most of all, by his regrettable habit of naming his friends in terms of their national fare: the "Macaronis," the "German Sausages," the "Rosbifs," and so forth. He meant no harm by it, and himself had taken no offence on hearing an Englishman refer to him as "the Frog."

He turned to Jacques, as if calling him to witness. "In France, even in big business circles, the new generation's caught on to it. They know damn well, deep down inside them, that the game is up; that they won't be able to live on the backs of the workers much longer; that one of these fine days the land and mines and factories and railways, the whole bag of tricks, has got to come back to the workers. The younger ones, anyhow, know it. Ain't that so, Thibault?"

Zelavsky and Skada spun quickly round and fixed keenly questioning eyes on Jacques, as if the point were one of extreme urgency and they were only waiting for Jacques's reply before making some momentous decision. Jacques smiled. True, he attached no less importance than they did to every symptom of impending social upheaval, but he was less convinced than they of the utility of such conversations.

"That's so," he agreed. "Many young Frenchmen of the middle class, I imagine, have developed secret doubts of the future of capitalism. The capitalist system still keeps their pockets lined, and they hope it will last out their lifetime. Still, they're beginning to feel uneasy. But that's all. It's a mistake to jump to the conclusion that they're on the point of deserting their class. On the contrary, I expect they'll put up a very stiff fight for their privileges, and they're still devilishly well entrenched. For one thing, oddly enough, they have the tacit consent of the poor devils whom they exploit; that's a big help."

"And don't forget," Périnet put in, "that they keep all the top jobs for their own selves, they run the show."

"Not only," Jacques observed, "do they run it but, for the time being, one might say they have a sort of right to run it. For, after all, where could we find—?"

A sudden bellow from Quilleuf interrupted him. "*Memories of a Proletarian*! Ha! Ha!" At the far end of the room Quilleuf was standing beside the table on which Charcovsky, the bookseller—who held the post of librarian—laid out each evening the new books, magazines, and newspapers that had just come in. All that could be seen of Quilleuf was his bent back and big shoulders quaking in a vast guffaw.

Jacques completed his remark. "Where could we find, at a moment's notice, men with enough expert knowledge to take their place? Why are you laughing, Sergei?"

For some moments Zelavsky had been contemplating Jacques with a look of mingled amusement and affection.

"In every Frenchman," he said, wagging his head, "dwells a sceptic who never sleeps but with one eye open."

Quilleuf had swung round abruptly. After a hasty glance at the other groups, he marched straight on Jacques, brandishing a book he had picked up from the table.

"Emile Pouchard. *Memories of a Proletarian Childhood*. What d'you make of this, eh, boys?" Guffawing, rolling his eyes, and thrusting forward his plump, jovial face to peer at each in turn, he comically overdid his fury for their entertainment.

"Here's another of these half-baked 'comrades,' some miserable whipper-snapper with his precious problems! Some dud pen-pusher who dumps his garbage on the workers' doorsteps!"

Quilleuf, hailed by his friends as "the Tribune"—alternatively, "the Cobbler"—came from the South of France. After many years at sea in the merchant marine and spells of multifarious work in Mediterranean ports, this rolling stone had fetched up at Geneva. His little bootshop was always thronged with workless militants who found there, after closing time at Headquarters, a fire in winter, soft drinks in summer, and at all times tobacco and good company.

There was a pleasant magic—which instinctively he turned to excellent account—in his melodious southern voice. Sometimes at public meetings, after fidgeting in his seat for a couple of hours, he would rush onto the platform and, though he had nothing new to put forward and merely clad the arguments of previous speakers in the glamour of his tempestuous eloquence, in a few phrases he

would carry his hearers with him and persuade them to vote for measures for which the cleverest orators had until then failed to get a majority. The difficult thing was to dam this spate of eloquence, once the flood-gates were opened; for the release of his pent-up enthusiasm and the sense of power that, radiating from his personality, swept his audience off their feet—not to say the sound of his own voice—gave him a physical pleasure so intense that he could never have enough of it.

Now he was fluttering the pages of the *Memories*, scanning the chapter headings, and sliding his fat forefinger under certain passages, like a child spelling out the words.

" 'The joys of family life'! 'The charm of home'! Oh, the son of a bitch!"

He shut the book, and with the neat precision of an expert on the bowling green, flexing his knees and swinging his arms, pitched it across the room onto the table.

"Look here!" He turned to Jacques again. "I don't see why I shouldn't write my memoirs, too. Don't I know all about 'the joys of family life'! And I've plenty of memories of childhood, and to spare, for those who haven't any!"

Drawn by the stentorian voice, others were strolling up to join the group around the Tribune, whose yarns always brought a gust of breezy realism into the rather academic atmosphere of these gatherings.

Half closing his eyes, he cast a swift glance round his audience, then began adroitly in a low, confidential tone. "Everyone here knows the Old Town at Marseilles, don't they? Well, that's where we lived, the six of us, at the end of a blind alley. In two rooms which, put together, made about half the size of this one. One of 'em hadn't no window. My dad had to get up by candlelight every morning, before the sun rose, and bitter cold it was. He'd haul me out of the heap of old rags where I slept with my brothers; seems he couldn't bear to see anyone else taking it easy while he was up and about. Every night he'd roll in very late, half drunk, after a godawful day loading barrels on the docks, poor devil. Ma was always ailing and wondering how to make both ends meet. Ma was as scared of him as we were. She, too, was out all day—doing chores, most likely, down in the town. As I'd the honour to be the first-born of the bunch, I had to keep the other three kids in order. And didn't I wallop it into them, seeing as how they got on my nerves, puling and mewling and snuffling and scrapping all the time. Nary a hot stew for us kids; a hunk of bread, an onion, and a dozen olives was all that came our way, with a rasher thrown in once in a blue moon. Never a square meal, never a kind word, never a lark, never a bloody thing! From morn till night we mooched about the streets, fighting like wildcats when we'd spotted a rotten orange in the gutter. Or we'd go sniffing the shells the lucky ones who were digging into sea-urchins chucked down on the sidewalk. At thirteen we'd started in with little girls, in the empty lots behind the billboards. My 'joys of family life'—to hell with them! Cold, hunger, injustice, jealousy, revolt! I'd been put to work as an apprentice at a blacksmith's; the only pay I got was kicks in the beam. My fingers were raw with burns, and my arms ached from tugging at the bellows, and my cheeks were scorched all day by the big, roaring forge." He had raised his tone; his voice was vibrant with indignation, and with pleasure at its own sound. Again with a swift glance he reviewed his audience. "Aye, I could tell some 'memories of childhood' if I set to it."

Jacques caught an amused twinkle in Zelavsky's eye. The Russian gently raised his arm toward Quilleuf, and asked: "How did you come to join the Party?"

"It's ancient history," Quilleuf said. "When I was at sea, I'd the luck to have two shipmates who bunked with me, who *knew*, and did a bit of propagandizing. I started reading, finding out about it. So did some of the others. We lent each other books, we talked things over. Cutting our wisdom teeth, eh? In six months' time there was a whole bunch of us that *knew*. When I left the ship, I'd grown up; I was—a man!"

He fell silent, staring before him into the middle distance.

"Yes, we were a group—a real gang of tough 'uns. What's become of all the others? Anyhow, they ain't written their 'Memoirs'—not they! … Hello, girls! And how's yourselves?" He turned gallantly toward two young women who were coming up. "Hot today, ain't it?"

The ring of listeners parted to include the two Swiss comrades, Anai's Julian and Emilie Cartier. One was a schoolmistress, the other a Red Cross nurse. They shared a flat, and usually came together to these gatherings. Anai's, the teacher, spoke several languages and made translations of foreign revolutionary articles for the radical Swiss papers.

They were very different in appearance. Emilie, the younger, was a small, plump brunette. Set off by the blue veil that suited her so well and which she almost always wore, her complexion had the creamy pink-and-whiteness of an English child's. She was a merry, mildly flirtatious girl, quick in her gestures and retorts, though the latter never had a sting. Her patients adored her. So did Quilleuf, who gave her no peace from his semi-paternal banter. In the broadest accents but with the utmost gravity, he would declare: "It ain't that she's exactly pretty, but our Emilie's a treat to look at."

Anai's, the other girl, was also dark; she had prominent cheekbones, a high colour, and there was a hint of surliness in the long, horselike face. But both alike gave an impression of perfect mental balance and vast reserves of strength—the fine serenity of those for whom what they think is in perfect harmony with what they are and do.

The conversation had taken a new turn.

Skada, the dreamer, was discoursing on justice.

"*Ach*, but ve should always spread more and more justice round us," he pleaded, in his slow, ingratiating voice. "Zat, zat is ze great thing to make men keep peace between zemselves."

"Stuff!" Quilleuf burst in. "When you ask for justice, I'm with you till hell freezes—that's sure. But, as for it making men keep peace, I wouldn't reckon too much on that; there's no fussier, more quarrelsome fellow on earth than one who has justice on the brain."

"Nothing lasts that isn't based on love," murmured little Vanheede, who had just moved to Jacques's side. "Peace is the work of faith, of faith and charity." He stayed motionless for a few moments, then walked away, an enigmatic smile upon his lips.

Jacques noticed Paterson and Alfreda slowly crossing the room together, still engrossed in a low-voiced conversation; they were going toward the other room, where presumably Meynestrel was to be found. Alfreda looked tinier than ever beside the Englishman; tall and lithe, his pipe as usual to the fore, he was bending toward her as they walked. His clean-shaven face, delicately moulded features, and the cut of his clothes, threadbare though they were, always made him seem better turned out than the others. As she passed, Alfreda cast at the group of men including Jacques that soft, brooding glance of hers in which sometimes, as now, there shone an unexpected gleam, a slumberous fire that seemed to mark her out for some high destiny.

Paterson smiled to Jacques. He was obviously in good spirits, which made him look more boyish than ever.

"Look what Richardley's given me!" he cried gleefully, holding out a small pack of tobacco. "Roll yourself a cigarette, Thibault. No? You're wrong." He took a puff and voluptuously rolled the smoke out through his nostrils. "I assure you, old boy, tobacco is the greatest boon on earth."

Smiling, Jacques watched his receding form. Then unthinkingly he too began to move toward the door which had just closed behind them. But on the threshold he halted and leaned against the doorjamb.

Meynestrel's voice was coming to him, harsh, cutting, with an ironic lift at the close of certain phrases.

"That goes without saying. I'm not against what are called 'reforms' as a matter of course. The struggle for reforms may serve in some countries as a fighting platform. And the improved conditions of life thus obtained by the proletariat may tend to speed up its revolutionary education to some extent. But your reformers always imagine that reforms are the only means to attain their ends. They're only one of many means. Your reformers think that social legislation and victories on the economic front are bound to increase not only the well-being of the masses but their striking-power. I wonder! They assume that reforms will be enough to bring about a state of affairs in which the proletariat need only make a quiet gesture and political power will drop into its hands like a ripe plum. That's as it may be! But no child is born without some very painful birth-pangs for the mother."

"And no revolution," a voice put in, "without a *Wirbelsturm*, a phase of storm and stress." Jacques recognized the voice as Mithoerg's.

"Your reformers," Meynestrel went on, "are grievously mistaken. Mistaken in two ways. Firstly, because they overestimate the proletariat; secondly, because they underestimate capitalism. The proletariat is still far short of the stage of development they fancy it has reached. It hasn't enough cohesion, not enough class-consciousness, not enough—heaps of other things, to be able to take the offensive and seize the reins of power. As for capitalism, your reformers imagine that because it's giving ground it will let itself be nibbled away piecemeal, by reform after reform, till nothing's left. That's nonsense. Its anti-revolutionary zeal, its powers of resistance are intact. And all the time it's preparing the ground, with diabolical cunning, for a counter-attack. Do you think the capitalists don't know what they're about when they accept reforms which win over to them the Party officials and divide the working class by making distinctions between the workers—and all the rest of it? Of course I know that capitalism's divided against itself; I know that, appearances notwithstanding, the mutual hostility between capitalist groups is steadily increasing. That's another reason why we may be sure capitalism, before throwing in its hand, will play all the cards it has up its sleeve. *All!* And one of the trump cards on which, rightly or wrongly, it most relies is—war! War, it reckons, will restore to it, at one swoop, all the ground it has been losing to the socialist advance. War will enable it to divide and crush the proletariat. Firstly, to divide it—because the masses are not at one in being immune from patriotic sentiments, and a war would set those who thought nationally (no small number, I should say) at loggerheads with those who were faithful to the international ideal. Secondly, to crush it—because considerable numbers of the workers on both sides would fall at the front and such as survived would be either dispirited, in the country that was beaten; or, in the victor country, easy to lull into a state of lethargy… ."

# Chapter VI

THAT Quilleuf—what a chap!" Sergei Zelavsky smiled. He had seen Jacques leave the group, and followed him. "Funny how they stick, the things that happen to us when we're children, isn't it?" He seemed even more "up in the clouds" than usual. "How about you, Thibault? What led you to become a—?" On the point of applying the term "revolutionary" to Jacques, he hesitated. "I mean, how do you come to be with us?"

"I wonder, now!" Jacques's faint smile and slight movement of retreat seemed to brush aside the question.

"Personally," Zelavsky went on immediately, with the eagerness of a shy man glad for once to yield to the temptation of talking about himself, "personally, I know quite well how one thing led to another, bit by bit, once I'd run away from college. But I think the ground had been well prepared. The first shock, it had come a great deal earlier, when I was quite a little kid."

He was looking down, his eyes fixed on his hands, which he was clasping and unclasping as he spoke—white, plumpish hands, with short, stubby fingers. A near view revealed a network of tiny wrinkles in the hollows of his temples, round his eyes. He had a long, hooked, flat-sided nose, the prowlike effect of which was heightened by the slanting eyebrows and receding forehead. The fair, preposterously large moustache seemed made of floss or spun glass, or some other curious feathery substance, and the least draught set it rippling delicately, like the filmy barbels of certain exotic fish.

He had shepherded Jacques discreetly to a quiet corner at the far end of the room, behind the table strewn with newspapers.

Without looking at Jacques, he went on talking about himself. "My father, he was the manager of a big factory he'd built on the family estate, six versts from Gorodnia. I can remember everything, oh, quite clearly. Really I never think about it." He smiled, raising his head and letting his gentle eyes linger on Jacques's face. "Only tonight—I wonder why that is?"

Jacques's way of listening—patient, earnest, and tactful—always won him confidences. Zelavsky's smile grew bolder.

"It is so amusing, all that, is it not? I remember the big house and Foma, our gardener, and the workmen's huts on the edge of the forest. I remember quite well, when I was little, there was a sort of special—what do you call it?—fête I went to with my mother; I suppose it happened every year; father's birthday it must have been. I saw my father standing by himself at a table in the middle of the factory yard, with a big pile of roubles on a dish in front of him. All the workmen, they march past him, one by one, in silence, with their backs bent. And to each my father hands a coin. Then each of them, one after another, he takes Father's hand and kisses it. Yes, that's how we were in Russia in those days; and I'm sure that even now, in 1914, it's just the same in some parts of the country. My father, he was a very tall man, with broad shoulders. He always held himself very straight up; I was afraid of him. So, perhaps, were the workmen.

"I remember, when my father went after breakfast to the works, in his fur coat and cap, always he took his revolver from the drawer of the hall table. And he slammed it—like that!—all at once into his pocket. And never he went out without his stick; it was all of lead and dreadfully heavy, I could hardly lift it, but he would twirl it between two fingers and whistle a tune." The Russian was still smiling at his memories. "My father, he was a very strong man," he went on after a short pause. "He frightened me because of that, but I loved him because of that. And all the workers, they were like me. They were frightened because he was hard, a tyrant, even cruel if it must be. But they loved him too, because he was strong. And then he was just; with no pity, but awfully just."

He fell silent again, as if troubled by a belated scruple. Then, reassured by Jacques's attentive air, he went on. "And then, one day, everything went wrong at home. There was a coming and a going of men in uniform. My father, he did not come back to dinner. My mother would not sit down to table. Doors banged. The servants ran up and down the passages. My mother never left the upstairs window. I heard them say: "strike," "fighting," "police charge." And suddenly there were shouts downstairs. Then I poke my head between two banisters on the stairs. What do I see? A long stretcher, all wet with mud and snow. And what do I see on it? My father lying flat, his overcoat torn up, his head bare. My father looking quite small, curled up, an arm hanging down. I started crying. They threw a cloth over my head and rushed me to the far end of the house, among the servants who were saying prayers before the icon and chattering like magpies. Then I got to understand. It was the workmen, the men I'd seen marching past my father with their backs nicely bowed, kissing his hand. It was the same workmen, who'd thought that day they'd had enough of scraping and bowing and being handed roubles. They'd smashed the machinery, and they'd proved themselves the stronger. Yes, the workmen. Stronger than Father!"

He had ceased smiling and was stroking his long moustache, peering up at Jacques with a quaintly solemn air.

"That day, my friend, all the world changed for me. No more I was on Father's side, I was on the workers' side. Yes, that day it happened. For the first time I knew how grand and fine that is: a crowd of bent-backs straightening them up."

"Had they killed your father?" Jacques asked.

Zelavsky went into a peal of laughter. "Killed? Not a bit! He was blue and black all over, you know, but nothing grave. Only after that, Father, he was not manager any more. He went back never to the works. He lived with us, with his vodka, bullying always my mother and the servants and peasants. Me they sent to the town, to college. I never came home. And one day, two or three years later, Mother wrote to me, telling me to pray and to be sad because my father was dead." His face had grown earnest again. Hurriedly he muttered, as if talking to himself: "But, of course, I'd given up praying already. It was quite soon after that I ran away."

They were silent for a while.

Jacques's eyes were fixed on the floor; his thoughts, too, had suddenly reverted to memories of childhood. He saw again his father's apartment in Paris; he could even smell the odour of the carpets and curtains, and the curious stuffiness, emanating from his father's study, that greeted him when he came home from school in the afternoon. Pictures rose in his mind of old Mile, de Waize pottering to and fro, and Gise, the childish Gise of long ago with her round face and glowing, faithful eyes. He recalled his schooldays: the classrooms and the playground, his friendship with Daniel, the masters' suspicion, the mad flight to Marseille and his homecoming with Antoine, his father waiting for them in his frock coat under the hall lamp. And then the dark phase of his youth: the reformatory, his cell, his daily walk escorted by a warder. A tremor ran through his body. Opening his eyes wide, he drew a deep breath and looked round the room.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, breaking impatiently away from the corner in which they had been standing, and shaking himself like a dog that has just scrambled out of a pond. "Why, there's Prezel!"

Ludwig Prezel and his sister Cecilia had just entered. They were casting helpless glances at the various knots of people in the room; obviously they were newcomers and feeling rather lost. When they noticed Jacques, they waved a friendly greeting simultaneously and moved quietly toward him.

Brother and sister were remarkably alike; both were of a height, and dark. They had the same rotund, somewhat thickset neck, the same type of head, the head one finds on classical busts, with boldly defined, impassive features, and which seems less a work of nature than moulded in accordance with a canon of art. The bridge of the nose continued the straight, downward movement of the forehead, without a notch at the level of the eyes. Even the eyes did little to impart animation to the statuesque faces; though perhaps Ludwig's seemed a little more alive than his sister's, in which there never shone a gleam of human emotion.

"We got back yesterday," Cecilia explained.

"From Munich?" Jacques inquired, as he shook hands with them.

"From Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin."

"And last month," Prezel added, "we were in Italy, at Milan."

A swarthy little man, with lopsided shoulders, who happened to be passing stopped short, his face aglow with interest.

"So you've been at Milan!" he exclaimed, and a broad smile disclosed his big, equine teeth. "Did you meet the Avanti comrades?"

"Of course."

Cecilia turned and looked at him. "Do you come from those parts?"

The Italian laughed and nodded emphatically several times.

Jacques introduced him: "Comrade Saffrio."

The sturdy, if slightly deformed, little Italian was a man in the forties. The dark velvety lustre of his night-black eyes gave beauty to his face.

"I knew your Italian Party before 1910," Prezel said. "There's no denying it used to be one of the feeblest in Europe. What a difference now! We watched the strikes during the Red Week. *Wunderbar*, the progress!"

"Yes, indeed!" Saffrio exclaimed. "What energy and courage!"

"Italy," Prezel continued in a didactic tone, "has certainly a great example taken from the organization methods of our German social-democracy. Also the Italian working class, it is well grouped together, well disciplined today, and ready to go quickly *vorwärts*. Markworthy is it that the peasant proletariat there is stronger than in any other land."

Saffrio chuckled with delight. "Fifty-nine members are on our side in Parliament. And our press! Why, our *Avanti* sells over forty-five thousand copies of each number. When were you in Italy?"

"In April and May. For the Ancona Congress."

"Know Serrati and Vella?"

"Serrati, Vella, Bacci, Moscallegro, Malatesta—we know them all."

"And our great Turati?"

"*Ach*, that one's only a liberal."

"And Mussolini? *He's* not just a liberal. He's the real thing! Have you met him?"

"Yes," Prezel replied briefly, with a faint grimace that Saffrio did not notice.

"We used to live together," the Italian went on, "Benito and I, at Lausanne. He was waiting for the amnesty, to be allowed to go back to our country. Every time he visits Switzerland, he comes to see me. Last winter …"

"*Ein Abenteurer*," Cecilia murmured.

"He comes from the Romagna—like me." A glint of pride flickered in Saffrio's eyes as he gazed at the Germans. "He's a boyhood chum of mine, is Benito—like a brother! His father kept an inn four miles from my home. I knew him well, the old man; he was one of the first internationalists in the Romagna. You should have heard him at his inn, trouncing the priests and patriots. And wasn't he proud of his son! He used to say: 'Benito and me, if one day we got down to the job, just he and I, we'd wipe out all the blackguards in the old country!' His eyes used to shine just like Benito's. Ever noticed the power there is in Benito's eyes?"

Turning to Jacques, Cecilia said some words in German in a low tone. Jacques smiled.

Saffrio's face darkened. "What was she saying about Benito?" he snapped.

"She said he … he shows off a bit, he pushes himself forward," Jacques translated.

"Mussolini?" Saffrio shouted, darting a furious glance at the girl. "No! Mussolini is as straight as a die, no hanky-panky about him. All his life he's been an 'anti'—anti-royalist, anti-patriot, anti-clerical. A great *condottiere*, too. The real revolutionary leader. And always practical, realistic. Deeds first, words after. And a perfect demon for work; during the Forli strikes he never took a moment's rest, holding meetings, speaking in the streets. A fine speaker, too; every word straight from the shoulder! 'Do this, don't do that!' You should have seen how pleased he was when we unscrewed the rails and held up a train. All the active measures against the Tripoli expedition were his work, his and his paper's. In Italy he's the incarnation of our fighting spirit. And it's he who day by day in the *Avanti* keeps the revolutionary *furia* at boiling-point. He's the man the King and his government have to fear most. Yes, if socialism's suddenly forged ahead in my country, it's mainly thanks to Benito. This last month, for instance. The Red Week. How he jumped at the opportunity! Ah, *per Bacco*, if only they'd listened to his paper! A few days more and Italy would have gone up in flames. If the *Confederazione* of Labour hadn't taken fright and called off the strike, it was the beginning of a civil war, the downfall of the monarchy. The Italian revolution! One night, in the Romagna, the comrades proclaimed the Republic. Si, *si*—it's a fact."

He had deliberately turned his back on Cecilia and her brother, and was addressing Jacques only. Smiling again, he added in a tone at once peremptory and wheedling: "Be careful, Thibault, and don't believe everything you hear."

Then, faintly shrugging his shoulders, he moved away, studiously ignoring the two Germans.

There was a short silence.

Alfreda and Paterson had left the door of Meynestrel's room open. He was not in sight but, though he was not speaking loudly, his voice could be heard now and again.

"And in your country," Zelavsky asked Prezel, "are things going well?"

"In Germany? Surely. Better and better."

"In Germany," Cecilia said, "twenty-five years ago there were only a million Socialists; ten years ago, two millions. Today there are four millions."

She spoke softly, hardly moving her lips, but the tone was challenging, and her dark, brooding eyes lingered first on Jacques, then on the Russian. Seeing her, Jacques was always reminded of Homer's epithet for Hera, "the ox-eyed goddess."

"That's certain," he said in a conciliatory tone. "Your 'Social-Demo' movement has put in some fine constructive work in the last twenty-five years. The genius for organization shown by its leaders is perfectly amazing. But perhaps one can't help wondering if the revolutionary spirit isn't—how shall I put it?—petering out a bit in the German Party. Precisely because your energies are directed wholly to organization."

It was Prezel who answered him.

"The revolutionary spirit petering out? *Nein*, you need not to fear on that score. You see, our first duty is to organize—a force to become. We stand for realities, not only theories; and that's what tells! If in these latter years—I'm thinking notably of 1911 and 1912—the peace has been kept in Europe, whose work was that? And if today we may hope that a great European war is out of the question for many years, it's thanks to whom? To the German proletariat. Everyone knows that. You spoke of the 'constructive work' done by social-democracy. It's an even greater work than you suspect—something truly solid and *kolossal*. Nothing short of a state within the state. And how did we do all this? Mostly by the energy we put forth in Parliament; and our influence in the Reichstag is still ground gaining. If tomorrow the Pan-Germanists tried to work up another Agadir affair, they'd find against them not only the two hundred thousand who demonstrated in Treptlow Park, but all the Socialist members of the Reichstag, with every liberal in the land behind them!"

Sergei Zelavsky had been listening attentively. Now he remarked: "Still, when the war levy was voted on, your Socialists voted aye."

"*Pardon*," said Cecilia, raising a monitory finger.

Her brother broke in at once, the German accent and idiom more pronounced now that he was speaking volubly.

"*Ach*, that was only *Taktik*, Zelavsky." His smile was slightly condescending. "You do not understand. There were two quite different things involved; there was the *Militcirvorlage*, the law concerning armaments, and there was the *Wehrsteuer*, the supplementary estimates for military expenditure. The Social-Democrats, first they voted *against* the militarist law and then, when it had been passed in spite of their opposition, they voted for supplies. And that was very clever *Taktik*. Why? Because in this law something there was absolutely new in the constitution, something quite vital to us: a direct imperial levy on private wealth. That was a not-to-be-missed chance for us! Because it was a real Socialist triumph for the proletariat. Now do you understand? And what proves our Socialist members are quite dead against the *Militarismus* is that every time they get a chance they vote against the Chancellor's imperialist foreign policy, like one man."

"That's so," Jacques admitted. "All the same …" He seemed reluctant to continue.

"All the same …?" Zelavsky prompted eagerly.

"All the same—what?" Cecilia asked.

"Well, I can't help it, but somehow when I was at Berlin and came in contact with some of your Socialist members, I had a feeling that their struggle against militarism was rather—how shall I put it?—half hearted. Liebknecht, of course, is an exception; I'm thinking of the others. I could see that most of them were reluctant to go to the root of the evil and attack it there; I mean, to challenge frankly and openly the subservience of the masses to the military power. It seemed to me that, in the last analysis, they were still, if I may say so, incorrigibly *German*; convinced, of course, of the world-wide mission of the proletariat, but convinced above all of the mission of the *German* proletariat. And very far from carrying their internationalism and anti-militarism as far as these are carried in France."

"Naturally," Cecilia said, and for a second the eyelids veiled the enigmatic eyes.

"Naturally," Prezel echoed in a tone of truculent superiority.

Zelavsky hastened to intervene.

"Your bourgeois democracies," he remarked with a shrewd smile, "they allow Socialists in their parliaments just because they know so well that a Socialist in the government, he's not a real dangerous Socialist."

From the other end of the room came Mithoerg, Charcovsky, and old Boissonis. Ludwig and Cecilia shook hands with them.

Zelavsky turned to Jacques, still smiling to himself, mildly and gently wagging his head to and fro.

"Do you know what I think? I think that, to keep the masses in servitude, your democratic governments, your republics and parliamentary monarchies, though they may not seem so, are methods no less terrible—and more cunning—than our Tsarist government, with all its horrors."

"Yes!" Mithoerg, who had overheard, put in excitedly. "And how right the Pilot was the other night when he said: 'The first task of the revolution is a fight to the death against democracy'!"

"Wait a bit!" Jacques said. "For one thing the Pilot had only Russia in mind, the Russian revolution. What he said was that the great change in Russia shouldn't start off with a bourgeois democracy. Also, don't let's exaggerate; one can do some useful work within the framework of a democracy. A man like Jaurés, for instance… . Just think what the Socialists have already achieved in France, and above all in Germany."

"No!" Mithoerg exclaimed. "Quite different things they are: the emancipation that comes by working within the framework of a democracy, and a revolution. In France the leaders have gone more or less bourgeois; they have cast off the pure revolutionary spirit."

"We're going to listen a bit to what they're saying at that end," Boissonis broke in, with a meaning glance toward the open door.

"Is Meynestrel there?" Prezel inquired.

"Don't you hear him?" said Mithoerg.

They stopped talking, listened. The sound of Meynestrel's voice came to them, all on the same note, meticulously clear.

Zelavsky slipped his arm in Jacques's.

"Let's go and hear it, too."

# Chapter VII

JACQUES came and stood beside Vanheede, who, with clasped hands and half-closed eyelids, was leaning against the dusty shelves that Monier used for storing out-of-date pamphlets.

"I, for one," said Trautenbach—a German Jew, with curling, sandy hair, who lived in Berlin but made frequent visits to Geneva—"I don't believe you can get anywhere by law-abiding methods. Leave those half-measures to the intellectuals."

"Not so fast," said Richardley, a tall young man with a shock of thick black hair. It was about him this cosmopolitan band had gathered, three years before, and until Meynestrel appeared on the scene he had been their leading spirit. Of his own accord, however, he had retired into the background before the superiority of the Pilot, at whose side he had ever since played the part of an able, devoted second-in-command. "The answer's different according to the country you've in mind. You can't deny that in some democratic countries, like France and England, the revolutionary movement does progress by legal means, for the time being." He always spoke with his lean, resolute chin thrust well forward. The clean-shaven face with the white forehead framed in dark hair was pleasant enough at first glance, yet the intensely black eyes had no trace of gentleness, the thin lips ended at each corner in a sharp-cut line, and there was a disagreeable harshness in his voice.

"The difficult thing," Charcovsky said, "is to know just when to proceed from law-abiding methods to violent, insurrectionary action."

Skada said with a jerk of his hooked nose: "Ven the steam pushes it up too strong, the lid of the samovar, it blows off of its own accord."

There was an outburst of laughter, fierce laughter, of the sort Vanheede used to refer to as "their cannibal glee."

"Bravo, Pundit!" Quilleuf cried.

"So long as all the power is in the hands of the capitalists," Boissonis observed, moistening his pink lips with his small, snakelike tongue, "the people's demands for democratic liberties can't do much to speed up the real revolu-"

"Obviously," Meynestrel cut in, without so much as a glance at the old professor.

There was a pause in the conversation.

Boissonis made an attempt to press his argument home. "Doesn't the course of history prove it? Just see what happened in the case of—"

This time it was Richardley who cut him short. "History, indeed! Does history ever justify the belief that one can foresee, that one can predict the hour when a revolution will break out? Never in your life! One fine day the samovar must blow up, but there's no foretelling just when the suppressed energy of popular discontent is going to take effect."

"That's as may be!" Meynestrel rapped out in a tone admitting no reply.

He said nothing further, but those who were used to his ways knew he was about to speak. At such gatherings, he would silently follow up a train of thought and stay for a long time without taking part in the discussion, merely interjecting an enigmatic "That's as may be" or an elusive and disarming "Obviously!" which, coming from any other man, might have had a ludicrous effect; but the shrewd glance, the sternness of the voice, the fixity of purpose and intense preoccupation that the tone conveyed never produced smiles. Rathfer, they compelled the attention even of those who were antagonized by his peremptory manner.

"There's a distinction to be made," he said. "You spoke of 'foreseeing' a revolution. What does that mean exactly?"

They were all listening now. He stretched out his injured leg in front of him and cleared his throat. His clawlike hand, the fingers of which were often half clenched as if holding an invisible ball, rose in the air, lightly stroked his beard, and came to rest on his breast.

"There's a distinction to be made between a *revolution* and an *insurrection*. Another distinction between a *revolution* and *revolutionary conditions*. Revolutionary conditions don't invariably lead to a revolution, even if they lead to an insurrection… . Take what happened in Russia in 1905; first there were revolutionary conditions, then an insurrection, but no revolution." He paused for a moment, setting his thoughts in order. "Richardley talks of 'foreseeing.' What does he mean by that? Accurately foreseeing just when conditions shall have become revolutionary is no easy matter. All the same, the action of the wage-earners, if brought to bear on prerevolutionary conditions, may foster and even speed up the growth of revolutionary conditions. But what actually gets a revolution under way is almost invariably some outside, unexpected, and more or less unpredictable event; one, I mean, the date of which cannot be determined in advance."

He had rested his elbow on the back of Alfreda's chair, his chin propped on his fist. For a minute the shrewd yet visionary eyes seemed riveted on some distant scene.

"Let's consider things exactly as they are. In reality. In actual practice." (He had a manner of his own, shrill as a clash of cymbals, of uttering the word "reality.") "For example, in Russia… . One should always hark back to examples! Hard facts! That's the only way of getting to know anything. We aren't dealing with mathematics. There's a lot in common between revolution and the art of medicine. First you have theory, and then practice. And a third thing's needed as well: the art of it. But that's beside the point." (Before proceeding he cast a smiling glance at Alfreda, as if, to his mind, she alone were capable of appreciating the digression.) "Well, in Russia in 1904, before the Manchurian War, conditions were prerevolutionary; prerevolutionary conditions which might have, which ought to have, led to actual revolutionary conditions. But in what way? Was it possible to foresee in what way? Certainly not!

"More than one abscess looked like coming to a head. There was the agrarian question. There was the Jewish question. There was the trouble with Finland, the Polish business. There was the Russo-Japanese tension in the Far East. It was quite impossible to guess which would prove the unexpected factor that was to transform the prerevolutionary phase into the revolutionary phase. And all of a sudden the unexpected happened. A camarilla of adventurers with an eye to the main chance succeeded in gaining sufficient influence over the Tsar to force him into a war in the Far East, without the knowledge and against the advice of his Foreign Minister. Who could have foreseen that?"

"Surely might it have been foreseen that the Russo-Japanese friction in Manchuria would inevitably bring about a clash," Zelavsky put in mildly.

"But who could foresee that the clash would take place in 1905, or that it would take place in connexion not with Manchuria but with Korea? Here is an example of the new factor that can transform prerevolutionary into revolutionary conditions. In the case of Russia it took that war, those defeats. Only then we saw conditions entering the revolutionary phase and leading to an insurrection. An insurrection, mind you, not a revolution. Not a revolution of the workers. And why not? Because the transition from revolutionary conditions to an insurrection is one thing, and that from an insurrection to a revolution is another… . Isn't that so, little girl?" he added in a low voice.

Several times while he was speaking he had craned his head forward to peer inquiringly at the young woman's face. Now he fell silent, apparently unmindful of the others' presence and of what he had just been saying. He seemed to be reviewing, on some transcendental plane, the whole set of doctrines which usually engrossed him, though never to the point of making him lose sight of the relation between theory and fact, between revolutionary ideals and the realities of the moment. He was staring straight before him. At such times his vitality seemed wholly concentrated in the dark intensity of his gaze—a gaze so little human that it brought to mind a secret, constant flame burning within him, wasting his tissues, eating his life away.

Old Boissonis, who was more interested in revolutionary theory than in actual revolution, broke the silence.

"Yes, yes! Quite so! It's devilish hard to foresee the switch-over from prerevolutionary to revolutionary conditions… . Wait a bit, though. Once revolutionary conditions have been created, shouldn't we be able to predict the outbreak of a revolution?"

"To 'predict'!" Meynestrel broke in, his nerves on edge. "There you go again! What matters isn't so much to predict. What matters is to prepare, to speed up the transition from revolutionary conditions to actual revolution. Everything then depends on subjective factors: the fitness of the leaders and the revolutionary groups for revolutionary action. And it's up to all of us, the vanguard, to raise that fitness to its highest power, by all and every means. When a sufficient degree of fitness is attained, then and only then does it become possible to accelerate the passage to revolution! Then it becomes possible to control the march of events! Then, if that's what you're after, it becomes possible to *foresee!*"

He had spoken the last few sentences all in one breath, lowering his voice, and so rapidly that many of the foreigners present had not been able to follow what he said. Now he stopped speaking and, throwing back his head a little, gave a brief smile and shut his eyes.

Jacques, who had remained standing, noticed an empty chair by the window; going up to it, he sat down. At no time did he partake more fully in the life of the community than when he was thus able to break contact, to avoid rubbing shoulders, and, keeping in the background, to feel that he possessed himself once more. At such moments his feelings were not merely those of fellowship but warmly fraternal. Ensconced now in his chair, his arms folded, leaning his head against the wall, he sent his gaze roaming over the group of his friends. After a desultory pause they were again turning toward Meynestrel. Their attitudes were various, but all alike passionately attentive. How he loved them, these men who had given themselves up body and soul to the revolutionary cause, men of whose combative, hounded existences he knew almost every detail!

What if he did disagree with certain of them on the ideological plane? What if he was grieved by the lack of understanding in some of them, by the rough ways of others? He loved them all for their integrity, their single-heartedness. And he was proud of being loved by them; for they did love him, different from them though he was, because they felt that he too was single-hearted. A sudden rush of emotion misted his eyes, blurring his sight of them as individuals, and for a while he seemed to see this little band of outlaws hailing from the four corners of Europe as a composite picture of oppressed mankind growing alive to its servitude and at last rebelling in a desperate effort to rebuild the world.

The voice of the Pilot broke the silence. "Let's come back to the precedent of Russia, to that great adventure. One's obliged to do so. In 1904, was it possible to foretell that the then prerevolutionary conditions would become revolutionary the very next year, after the reverses in the Far East? No! And in 1905, once a state of revolution had been matured by circumstances, was it possible to know whether the revolution, the real proletarian revolution, would break out? No! And still less whether it could succeed. The objective factors looked highly promising. But the subjective factors were inadequate. Remember how things stood. Objective conditions, first rate: military disasters, a political crisis. An economic crisis, too: supplies had run out, and there was little short of a famine. And so on… . And the political temperature was rising to fever-heat, what with general strikes, peasant rebellions, mutinies, the *Potemkin* affair, the December insurrections in Moscow. Why, then, did revolutionary conditions fail to produce a revolution? On account of the inadequacy of the subjective factors, Boissonis. Because nothing was in proper shape. There was no real will to revolution. No clear line of action in the minds of the leaders. No agreement between them. No subordination, no discipline. No coordination between leaders and the led. And, above all, no unity between the industrial and the rural masses; no active revolutionary leaven among the peasantry."

There was a timid protest from Zelavsky. "But surely the mu-jiks …?"

"The mujiks? Yes, they kept up a certain agitation in their villages; they occupied the estates of their overlords, burnt down a barine's manor-house here and there. Granted! But who was it showed their willingness to fight the workers? Why, the mujiks! Who were the rank-and-file that savagely shot down, wiped out the revolutionary proletariat in the streets of Moscow? Mujiks, every one of them. An utter lack of the subjective factors!" he repeated bitterly. "When one knows what happened in December 1905; when one thinks of the time wasted in windy rhetoric within the ranks of social-democracy; when one finds that the leaders hadn't even agreed upon the aims to be pursued, hadn't even agreed upon a general plan of campaign—so much so that the strikes in St. Petersburg were stupidly called off just when the disturbances began in Moscow, so much so that the strike in the postal and railway services came to an end in December, just when a breakdown in the transport services would have paralysed the government and prevented them from bringing up to Moscow the regiments which promptly smashed the insurrection—yes, when one remembers all these things, it's easy to understand why, in that Russia of 1905, the revolution"—he hesitated for a fraction of a second, bent his head toward Alfreda, then muttered very fast—"why the revolution was doomed, doomed from the outset."

Richardley, who with his elbows on his knees and shoulders bent forward had been listening, twiddling his thumbs, now looked up in surprise. "Doomed from the outset?"

"Of course it was!" Meynestrel replied.

There was a pause.

Jacques, from his seat, ventured to suggest: “In that case, instead of trying to force things to an issue, wouldn’t it have been better…?”

Meynestrel, who was gazing at Alfreda, smiled without turning toward Jacques. Skada, Boissonis, Trautenbach, Zelavsky, and Prezel nodded approval.

“Considering,” Jacques continued, “that the Tsar had granted them the Constitution, wouldn’t it have been better …?” He paused again. Boissonis completed the phrase: “… to have come to a tentative agreement with the bourgeois parties?”

“And to have taken advantage of the situation to reorganize Russian social-democracy on a sound basis,” Prezel added.

“No, I don’t agree with you there,” Zelavsky protested mildly. “Russia isn’t Germany. And I consider that Lenin was right.”

“Certainly not!” Jacques exclaimed. “Plekhanov was right. After the October Constitution, the best thing to do was not to take up arms. The thing to do was to call a halt, to consolidate the ground won.”

“They took the heart from the masses,” Skada put in. “For no purpose they sent people to their death.”

“Quite true!” Jacques eagerly assented. “They’d have saved no end of suffering, no end of needless bloodshed.”

“That’s as may be!” Meynestrel’s voice was gruff. He was no longer smiling.

All waited in silence for him to speak again.

“A foredoomed attempt?” he went on after a short pause. “Undoubtedly. Foredoomed as far back as October. But needless bloodshed? Certainly not!’ ”

He had risen from his seat—a thing he very rarely did, once he had begun speaking. He went over to the window, looked out absent-mindedly, and hurriedly returned to Alfreda’s side.

“The December rising could not lead to the triumph of a new regime. Granted! But was that a reason not to act as if that triumph had been feasible? Surely not. In the first place because one never can tell how strong revolutionary forces are until they’ve been put to the test, until after a revolution has been attempted. Plekhanov was wrong. It was necessary to resort to force after October. It was needful that blood should be shed. 1905 was only a rehearsal. A necessary one; historically necessary, I mean. October was, after the Commune and on a larger scale, the second attempt to turn an imperialistic war into a social revolution. The blood that was spilled was not spilled in vain! Down to 1905 the whole Russian nation—even the proletariat-believed in the Tsar. People crossed themselves when they spoke his name. But when the Tsar ordered the people to be fired upon, the proletariat and even many mujiks began to realize that there was nothing to be expected from the Tsar, any more than from the ruling classes. In so mystical-minded, so backward a country, this bloodshed was indispensable for the promotion of class-consciousness. Nor is that all. From the standpoint of technique, of revolutionary technique, the experiment was an extremely valuable one. The leaders were thus able to put their abilities to the test for the first time. As will perhaps be proved in the near future!”

He was still standing, his eyes flashing, every sentence punctuated by some motion of his hands. His wrists were as supple as a woman’s, and the dainty, sinuous movements of his fingers made each gesture reminiscent of the East, of the expressive hand-play of Cambodian dancers or Indian snake-charmers.

He patted Alfreda’s shoulder, and sat down again.

“As will perhaps be proved in the very near future,” he repeated. “Europe today, like 1905 Russia, is obviously in a prerevolutionary ferment. The interests of the capitalist world are in a state of latent conflict. The apparent prosperity Europe now enjoys is a mere illusion. But when and how will the new factor emerge? Of what nature will it prove to be? An economic crisis? A political crisis? A war? A revolution within some state or other? A clever man, indeed, who could foretell that. Not that it matters, of course. The new factor will emerge in its due time. What does matter is to be ready when that time comes. In the Russia of 1905 the proletariat was not ready. That’s why the attempt proved an utter failure. Are the European workers ready Are their leaders ready? No. Is there sufficient solidarity among the sections of the International? No. Is the unity between the leaders of the proletariat well enough established to ensure efficiency? No. Is it to be supposed that the triumph of the revolution will ever be possible without a close cohesion between the revolutionary forces of every country? True, they’ve set up this International Bureau. But what does it amount to? Very little more than an organ of information. Not even the embryo of that Central Proletarian Power lacking which no simultaneous and decisive action will ever be possible! The Socialist International? A demonstration of the spiritual unity of the workers. And that’s no mean achievement. But it has little organization as yet. Everything remains to be done. In what way does it exert its activities? In getting up congresses! Don’t think I’m sneering at our congresses! I’ll be in Vienna, myself, on August 23. But, in point of fact, there’s nothing to be expected from such gatherings. Take Basel, for instance, in 1912. A grandiose demonstration against the war in the Balkans. Granted! Now let’s see what came of it. Admirable resolutions were passed amid vast enthusiasm. But especially to be admired was the skill with which the real problem was sidetracked. Why, they even cut out the words ‘general strike’ in their resolutions! Remember the proceedings. Was the problem of a strike at any time examined thoroughly, as a practical problem—to be solved in a different way according to the circumstances, according to the country? What should the *positive* attitude of the workers in such and such a country be, in the event of such and such a war? War is a specific factor; the proletariat, another factor. But when such factors are discussed, our leaders talk ‘about it and about,’ like parsons babbling about good and evil. That’s how things are. The International carries on like a Sunday school. The fusion between doctrine, on the one hand, and the class-consciousness, resources, and revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses, on the other, hasn’t even begun.”

He was silent for a few moments. Then, “Everything remains to be done,” he said in a low, pensive voice. “Everything. The education of the workers implies a huge, coordinated effort that has hardly been started as yet. I must refer to this at Vienna. Everything remains to be done,” he repeated very softly. “Isn’t that so, little girl?”

He smiled briefly; then his gaze swept his audience, and his brows knitted.

“For instance, how is it that the International hasn’t yet bethought itself of having a monthly or, better, a weekly paper of its own? A European news-sheet published in every language and common to every labour organization in every country? I’ll refer to this at the Congress. It’s the best way for the leaders at one and the same time to give one and the same answer to the millions of workers who in every country are asking themselves practically the same questions. It’s the best way of enabling every worker, whether militant or otherwise, to be kept accurately posted as to political and economic conditions throughout the world. In the present state of affairs it’s one of the best ways of still further developing the international instinct in the workers; an ironworker of Motala or a

Liverpool longshoreman must be brought to feel as an event affecting him personally a strike that has just broken out in Hamburg, or in San Francisco, or in Tiflis. The mere fact that every worker, every peasant, when he comes home from his work on a Saturday evening will find waiting on his table, ready to hand, a paper he knows to be, at the same hour, in the hands of every wage-earner throughout the world; the mere fact that he is able to read in it items of news, statistics, information, resolutions which he knows are being read at the same time throughout the world by all such as are conscious, as he himself is, of the rights of the masses—these facts alone would have an *incalculable* informative effect. Besides which, the effect on the governments would be-"

The concluding phrases were poured forth at a speed which made them very hard to catch. He broke off sharp on seeing Janotte, the lecturer, come in, accompanied by a few friends. And all the regular attendants at Headquarters knew the Pilot would say nothing more that evening.

# Chapter VIII

Jacques had not seen Janotte before. The man was exactly as Alfreda had described him. In a suit of an old-fashioned cut, a shade too tight for his bulky form, he tiptoed across the room; his curatelike gestures, his bows and scrapes, seemed out of keeping with the pomposity of his countenance, crowned with a shock of prodigiously white hair like the mane of some heraldic animal.

Jacques got up at once and, in the general confusion while the introductions were being made, slipped away to the little study at the far end, to await Meynestrel there. He had not long to wait before, accompanied as usual by Alfreda, Meynestrel entered the-room.

The interview was brief. In a few minutes Meynestrel had sorted out from the Guittberg-Tobler file all the documents bearing on the charge against them and handed them over to Jacques, along with a personal note for Hosmer. Then he gave some general advice as to the best way to set about the investigation.

He rose from his chair. "And now, little girl, to supper!"

Quickly Alfreda gathered up the papers scattered on the table and slipped them into their places in the file.

Meynestrel went up to Jacques and gazed at him for a while. Then, in a friendly voice, quite different from the tone he had been using during their previous conversation, he gently asked: "What's wrong this evening?"

Taken aback, Jacques smiled uneasily. "Nothing's wrong—I assure you!"

"You're not put out by this trip to Vienna?"

"Quite the contrary. Why?"

"Just now, I fancied you seemed worried …"

"Not a bit of it!"

"… and a little … lost."

Jacques smiled more naturally. " 'Lost!' " he repeated. Then his shoulders drooped as if he suddenly felt tired, and the smile left his lips. "Yes, there are days when, for some reason one can't fathom, one feels more than usually … lost. But you must know all about that, Pilot."

Without answering, Meynestrel took two steps that brought him to the door, whence he looked back to see if Alfreda was ready. Then he opened the door for her to go out before him.

With a fleeting smile he turned to Jacques, murmuring in a breath: "Of course. Of course, I know all about that."

Everyone had left. Monier was busy putting back the chairs and generally tidying up. On Saturday and Sunday nights Headquarters usually did not empty till the small hours. But on this particular evening most of the habitues had arranged to meet after dinner at the Salle Ferrer, for Janotte's lecture.

Meynestrel had let Alfreda go a little ahead. Now he took Jacques's arm and, limping a little, went down the stairs beside him.

"One's alone, my dear Jacques. And one's got to accept that once for all." He spoke hurriedly, in a low voice. Pausing, he shot a glance in Alfreda's direction, and repeated almost in a whisper: "Yes, always alone." His tone was detached, as though he were making a general observation, without a trace of melancholy or regret. Yet Jacques felt certain that just now the Pilot had some personal experience in mind.

"Yes, indeed I know it," Jacques sighed, slowing down till he actually stopped, as if brought to a halt by the dead weight of unformulated thoughts that he was dragging after him. "It's the curse of Babel! Men of the same age, the same way of living, and the same ideas, can spend a whole day talking to each other in the most sincere, forthright way—and not understand each other for a single moment, never once meet truly heart to heart. As close as close can be, yet hopelessly aloof. Like pebbles on the lakeside, always touching each other, never uniting. And I sometimes wonder if human speech, by giving us an illusion of agreement, doesn't really keep us more apart than bring us together."

Glancing up, he saw that Meynestrel, too, had halted. Standing on the bottom step, he was listening in silence to the melancholy voice echoing in the cavernous hall.

"Oh, if only you knew how sick to death I sometimes am of—words!" Jacques burst out passionately. "Sick of our eternal palavers! Sick and tired of all that—ideology!"

At the last word Meynestrel made a quick gesture with his hand. "Obviously," he said. "Talking should always lead to action. But, so long as it's impossible to act, merely to talk is better than doing nothing."

He glanced toward the courtyard, where Paterson and Mithoerg were walking to and fro, waving their arms, no doubt continuing a "palaver" that had begun upstairs. Then his keen eyes settled on Jacques.

"Be patient. This ideological phase is—only an episode. An indispensable preliminary. It's by way of debate that the principles of a doctrine are stabilized. Without a theory of revolution we can have no revolutionary movement. No leaders. Our 'ideology' annoys you. Yes, to our successors it will very likely seem an absurd waste of energy. But is that our fault?" He added in a breath: "The time for action hasn't come yet."

Jacques's attentive gaze seemed asking him to explain himself. Meynestrel went on speaking. "The capitalist system is still holding its own. There are signs of wear and tear in the machine, but it's still working more or less efficiently. True, the proletariat is restive and oppressed, but, when all is said and done, it isn't dying of starvation—yet. In this halting, broken-winded social order that is living on its reserves of energy, what the devil do you expect them to do, these men of vision who're waiting for the time to act? They talk. They keep their spirits up with theories! They're bursting with energy, and the only run they can give themselves is in the field of ideas. For so far we haven't come to grips with actual events."

"Ah," Jacques sighed, "if only we could come to grips with them!"

"Patience, my boy! It won't last for ever. The flaws within the system are showing up more and more. Causes of friction between the nations are multiplying; their competition for the world's markets has reached the danger-point. It's a matter of life and death; the whole system is based on the assumption of steadily widening markets. Which is absurd, for markets can't expand indefinitely. That

means they're in for it when a crisis breaks! The world's heading straight for a catastrophe, a general smash-up. Just wait and see. Wait till the economic balance of the world is thoroughly upset. Wait till machinery has thrown more and more people out of work. Wait till bankruptcy and ruin are rife, and no work's forthcoming anywhere, and the capitalist system finds itself in the position of an insurance company all of whose policy-holders have been run over on the same day! Then …"

"Then?"

"Then we'll drop ideology. Then there'll be no more palavering. We'll roll up our sleeves because the time to act has come, because at long last we can come to grips with solid facts." His face lit up, then as suddenly grew dark. "Meanwhile we must be patient." He looked round to see where Alfreda was. And though she was too far off to hear him, he asked mechanically in an undertone: "Isn't that so, little girl?"

Alfreda had joined Paterson and Mithoerg.

"Come to the Caveau with us to have something to eat," she said to Mithoerg, without looking at Paterson. "He must come, mustn't he, Pilot?" she cried gaily to Meynestrel. Which, for Paterson and Mithoerg, implied: "The Pilot will pay for everyone."

Meynestrel signified assent with a flutter of his eyelashes.

"After dinner we'll all go on together to the Salle Ferrer," Alfreda added.

"Count me out," Jacques said.

The Caveau, a little vegetarian restaurant, was situated in a basement in the Rue Saint-Ours, behind the Promenade des Bastions. This was the heart of the students' quarter at Geneva, and the restaurant was patronized principally by Socialist students. The Pilot and Alfreda often dined here when they did not return to Carouge for an evening's work.

Meynestrel and Jacques walked in front, with Alfreda and the two young men some yards behind them. The Pilot had begun speaking with the suddenness that was his wont.

"You know, we're extremely lucky, in point of fact, to be living in this ideological phase. To have been born on the threshold of a new era. You're too hard on our comrades. Personally, I think their youth and keenness atone for everything, even their palavers."

A shade of melancholy, which Jacques failed to notice, flitted across his face. He looked round to see if Alfreda was still behind.

Unconvinced, Jacques resolutely shook his head. In his moods of depression he was apt to judge the young men round him with severity. In his opinion most of them thought on crude, narrow lines, the malice and intolerance of which they cheerfully condoned. They systematically applied their intelligence to bolstering up these views instead of widening or reshaping them. Many of them, to his thinking, were rebels more interested in their personal grievances than in humanity.

Still, he refrained from criticizing his comrades in the Pilot's presence. All he said was: "Their youth? Well, I'd be more inclined to blame them for not being young enough."

"Not young enough!"

"Certainly. Their spirit of hatred, for instance, is a quality of age. Little Vanheede's right: love, not hatred, is the quality of youth."

"Dreamer!" Mithoerg, who had just joined them, exclaimed in a low, emphatic voice; behind the large round glasses, his eyes slewed about in Meynestrel's direction. "You've got to hate hard if your thought's to flame up into action," he added after a moment, now gazing straight before him into space. Almost immediately he went on in an aggressive tone. "Just as one's always got to kill wholesale to win a victory. That's the way it is!"

"No," Jacques rejoined composedly. "No hatred and no violence, please! You'll never have me with you on those terms."

Mithoerg's eyes lingered on him unamiably. Jacques, who had half turned toward Meynestrel, paused before continuing. As Meynestrel made no comment, he broke out almost roughly. " 'You've got to *hate*!' 'One's *got* to kill!'—what do you know about it, Mithoerg? Supposing a great revolutionary leader brought off a bloodless victory—by working on men's minds—all your notions of revolution by violence would go by the board."

The Austrian was striding ahead a little apart from the others, with a stern look on his face. He made no comment.

Jacques went on speaking, turning again to Meynestrel. "If in the course of history there's always been so much bloodshed associated with revolutions, that's because the men who led them had not planned them, thought them out enough, in advance. They've always been more or less rough-and-ready *coups*, rushed through in an atmosphere of panic by fanatics like us who made a fetish of violence. They called it revolution, but they aimed no higher, really, than civil war. I admit that violence can't be dispensed with when there's been no planning; still, I see nothing absurd in picturing another sort of revolution taking place in the civilized world of today—a gradual revolution, the work of men who're not in a hurry, men like Jaurés, men of broad views and culture. They'll have had time to work out their theories and draw up a scheme of progressive action. I'd call them 'opportunists' in the best sense of the term, for they'll have cleared the ground for taking over power by a series of opportune moves, by exploiting at the same time all that can serve their ends: parliaments, trade unions, municipalities, labour movements, strikes, and so forth. Revolutionaries, yes; but I see them as statesmen, too, men who carry out their programme with the authority, the breadth of view and calm tenacity of purpose that come from thinking clearly and knowing that time is fighting on their side. It would all happen in an orderly way, and they'd always keep control of the march of events."

" 'Control of the *marsch* of events'!" Mithoerg snarled, gesticulating wildly. "*Dummkopf!* That's not the way a new order comes about! Noways shall we picture it coming except under pressure of a catastrophe, at a time of fierce collective *Krampf*, when all men with rage are boiling." (At such moments the thick, Teutonic burr in his voice was specially pronounced.) "Nothing really new can be done without the big push that hate shall give. And, before building, there must first be a *Wirbelsturm*, a cyclone, that smashes everything, levels out all into the dust!" He uttered the last words with lowered brows, in a tone of grim detachment. He looked up again. "*Tabula rasa! Tabula rasa!*" The violent gesture accompanying the words seemed to sweep away all obstacles, making the void before it.

Jacques took some steps in silence before replying. "Yes," he sighed, trying to retain his composure. "You—all of us—stand by the assumption that the idea of revolution's incompatible with the idea of order. We're all fuddled with heroic, bloodthirsty romanticism. But may I tell you what I think, Mithoerg? There are days when I ask myself: What's really behind this general adhesion to a gospel of violence? Is it only that violence is necessary if we're to make good? No. There's another reason, too; it's because such notions pander to our lowest instincts, to the beast that slumbers deep down in all of us. We need only watch our faces in the glass, and see the way our eyes light up, our grin of cruel, barbaric exultation, whenever we pretend to think that violence is indispensable. The

truth is that we hold by it for much less avowable, far more personal motives; each of us has at the bottom of his heart some old score to pay off, some grudge to satisfy. And to enable us to relish this craving for revenge without a qualm what could be better than explaining it away as the acceptance of an inevitable law?"

Offended, Mithoerg swung round on him. "*Nein*," he protested, "I don't …"

Jacques brushed aside the interruption. "Wait! I'm not accusing any individual. I said 'we.' I state the facts, that's all. The craving to destroy is stronger than the hope of building up. For how many of us does not the revolution mean just this: not so much a step toward the regeneration of society as an opportunity for glutting that lust for vengeance which would have a glorious run in street-fights, civil war, a forcible seizure of the reins of power? What a field-day for reprisals it would be, that day when, after blasting our way to triumph, we in our turn imposed another tyranny, the tyranny of our justice! In the heart of every revolutionary there is, besides much else, the instinct of an 'agitator.' No, don't shake your head! Which of us can dare to say he is wholly immune from the virus of destruction? Even in the best, the most unselfish, loftiest-minded of us I sometimes have a glimpse of a drunken bully skulking in the background."

"All quite true," Meynestrel put in. "But is that the crucial question?"

Jacques quickly turned, hoping to catch his eye. Without success. He had an impression that Meynestrel was smiling, but could not be sure. He, too, smiled—though at something he had just remembered, the remark he himself had made a little while before: "I'm sick of our eternal palavers!"

His eyebrows arched in scornful crescents above his spectacles, Mithoerg seemed determined not to answer.

They had reached the Bourg-du-Four Square, and crossed it in silence. The old slate roofs glowed in the declining light, and the narrow Rue Saint-Léger lay in front like a deep, dark ravine. Behind them sounded two young, high-pitched voices: Paterson's, Alfreda's. Jacques heard their laughter, but could not catch the words. Several times Meynestrel had glanced back toward them over his shoulder.

Without explaining the link between what he now said and what he had been saying, Jacques remarked: "It's as if the individual couldn't enlist in the group and join forces with it, without first discarding all his standards… ."

"What standards?" the Austrian broke in; his demeanour implied that he was at a loss to see any connexion between the remark and what had gone before it.

Jacques hesitated; then, "The standards of a decent man," he said at last, in a low, evasive tone, as if he were afraid of seeing the argument diverge into this new field.

There was a short silence. Suddenly Meynestrel's voice rang out stridently. "The standards of a decent man?" An incomprehensible question, but put with animation, and Jacques seemed to discern a hint of emotion in the voice.

He had several times already detected, as he thought, in Meynestrel's dry, matter-of-fact manner a nuance giving an impression that that manner was less natural than studied; that it served to mask the anguish of a sensitive mind which had found out all there is to be known regarding human nature and, deep below the surface, mourned inconsolably its dead illusions.

Mithoerg, who had noticed only the vivacity of the tone, began to laugh, and clicked his thumbnail against his teeth.

"And you, Thibault, haven't *that* much political nous!" His tone implied that the discussion was closed.

Jacques could not repress an outburst of annoyance. "If having political nous, as you call it, means—"

This time Meynestrel intervened. "Political nous, Mithoerg, what does it really amount to? It means that one can bring oneself to use, in the class struggle, methods which would disgust us, seem little short of criminal, in private life. Isn't that so?"

He had begun the remark in an ironic tone, but ended on an earnest one, restrained though fervent. Then he began chuckling to himself, his mouth shut, breathing in little puffs through his nose.

Jacques was on the verge of answering Meynestrel, but his respect for the Pilot always held him in check. He addressed Mithoerg instead. "A real revolution …"

"A really real revolution," Mithoerg thundered, "a revolution to save the nations, however fierce she is, has no need to be excused for!"

"Yes? So the methods employed don't matter a bit?"

"Precise-ly!" Mithoerg approved, without letting Jacques continue. "Action, it does not take the same road as your imaginative speculations. Action, *Kamerad*, grips a man by the throat. In action, *ja*, only one thing counts—to win! You may think what you will, but for me the object, it isn't to take revenge. *Nein*, my object is to put man free. Against his will, if necessary. With the guillotine. When you want to save a man who is drowning in the river, you begin by banging him hard on the head to make him let you save him nice and quiet. The day when the struggle really has begun, for me there will be one thing to aim at—to drive out, to smash the capitalist tyranny. And for knocking out a Goliath so *kolossal*, one who sticks at nothing to bring the people under his thumbs. I'm not as simple as to pick and choose my methods of attack. To crush out wicked, silly things, everything that crushes comes in handy, even wickedness and silliness; If injustice can help, if ferocity can help, then I will be unjust, ferocious. Any weapon's good,, enough for me, if it gives more power to my arm. In that war, I tell you, anything's allowed. Anything you will—except being beaten."

"No!" Jacques cried out passionately. "No!"

He tried to catch the Pilot's eye, but Meynestrel had clasped his hands behind his back and, his shoulders bowed, was walking some little way off, alongside the houses, staring at the sidewalk.

"No!" Jacques repeated. He was on the brink of saying: "That sort of revolution doesn't interest me. A man who is capable of such brutal, bloodthirsty acts, and of calling them 'acts of justice,' such a man, when the battle's won, will never regain his decency, his dignity, his respect for mankind, his passion for fair dealing, and his independence of thought. If I'm all for the revolution, it isn't to put madmen of that sort on top!" But all he actually said was: "No! Because I know only too well that the violence you exalt is a menace, at the same time, to the highest side of life."

"That can't be helped. We can't let ourselves be—how do you say it?—hamstrung by the scruples of intellectuals. If what you call the highest side of life has got to go, if the activities of the mind have got to be for half a century kept under, it can't be helped. Like you, I regret. But I say: So be it! And if, to become truly efficient, I must first be blinded, 'Out with my eyes!' say I."

Jacques could not help protesting. "No, I can't agree. Don't say: 'That can't be helped!' Listen, Mithoerg." He addressed himself to the Austrian, but it was for Meynestrel's benefit that he was trying to define his viewpoint. "Don't imagine I attach less importance to

our final goal than you do. If I protest, indeed, it's in the interests of that ideal. A revolution that's carried out in an atmosphere of lies, of cruelty and injustice, can only be a false dawn; it will do nothing for humanity. Such a revolution carries within it the germs of its ultimate decay. Nothing it achieves by such methods can be lasting. Sooner or later its turn will come to perish. Violence is a weapon of the oppressor. Never will it bring true freedom to the nations of the earth. It can only install successfully a new type of oppression. Let me have my say!" he shouted, angered at seeing Mithoerg on the point of breaking in. "I'm not blind to the force you and those who think like you derive from this theory of ruthlessness; perhaps I'd sink my personal distaste for it, I might even turn ruthless myself, if I thought it would lead to good results. But that's just the point; I don't believe in its effectiveness. I'm positive that no true progress can be achieved by sordid methods. It's sheer nonsense glorifying violence and hatred as means to bring about the triumph of justice and fraternity. It's betraying, at the very outset, the world-wide justice and brotherhood that we're aiming at. No. You may think what you like about it, but for me the denial of all moral values is fatal to the true revolution, the only revolution worthy of our utter, wholehearted allegiance."

Mithoerg was about to retort when, "Jacques, you're an incorrigible little rascal!" Meynestrel broke in, in the high falsetto voice he sometimes assumed and which never failed to disconcert his hearers.

He had listened to the argument without intervening. The clash of two conflicting temperaments always interested him. These academic distinctions drawn between material and ideal ends, between violence and non-violence, struck him as so much beating of the wind—perfect illustrations of the false problem with ill-stated premisses. But what was the use of saying that?

Both Jacques and Mithoerg were startled into silence. Turning toward the Pilot, the Austrian gazed for a moment at the impenetrable face, and the approving smile he had conjured up froze on his lips; he looked discomfited. He was put out by the turn Jacques had given to the discussion; vexed with Jacques, with the Pilot—and with himself.

After some minutes' silence he deliberately slowed down, let the other two go ahead of him, and joined Paterson and Alfreda.

Meynestrel took advantage of Mithoerg's absence to move to Jacques's side.

"What you're after," he said, "is to purge the revolution of its grosser elements, before it's taken place. Too soon! That would prevent its ever taking place." He paused and, as though he had guessed how galling the remark had been for Jacques, he added at once, with a comprehending glance: "Still … I understand you very well."

They continued walking down the street, in silence.

Jacques was musing on his upbringing, applying himself to a review of his mental background. "A classical education. Middle-class surroundings. They give a kink to one's mind that is never quite straightened out. For a long time I thought I was born to be a novelist; in fact it's only quite recently I've abandoned that idea. I've always been so much more drawn to looking on, to noting impressions, than to forming judgments and conclusions. And, obviously, for a revolutionary that's a drawback." The thought distressed him. He rarely indulged in self-deception—anyhow, not consciously. He felt neither superior nor inferior to his comrades; but he felt different from them and, generally speaking, of less value as a revolutionary agent. Would he ever be able, like them, to discard his personal viewpoint, to sink mind and will in the abstract doctrines and common activities of a party?

Abruptly he remarked in a low tone: "Is a man necessarily disqualified for joining in the action of a group because he clings to and safeguards his personal freedom of thought? Surely, Pilot, that's exactly what you do?"

Meynestrel did not seem to hear him. Still, after a few moments, he murmured: "Individualist standards. Human standards. Do you think the two terms are identical?"

Jacques's eyes were still intent on his friend's face, and his look of silent interrogation, it seemed, impelled the Pilot to make his meaning clearer. But when he spoke, the words came almost reluctantly.

"The great movement of humanity in which we are engaged is beginning to effect a tremendous change, not only in the relations between man and man, but at the same time—and to an extent we still have no conception of—within the individual, even in what he fancies are his natural instincts."

He fell silent again, and seemed to withdraw into his meditations.

# Chapter IX

MITHOERG was walking with Alfreda and Paterson a few yards behind, but without joining in their conversation.

The young woman had to take two steps to the long-legged Englishman's one, to keep abreast of him. She was chattering away without constraint and keeping so close to her companion that at every step Paterson's elbow brushed her shoulder.

"It was when the strikes were on," she was saying, "that I saw him for the first time. Some friends from Zürich had persuaded me to attend a public meeting. We were in one of the front rows. He got up and spoke. I couldn't take my eyes off him. His eyes, his hands… . There was a free-for-all at the end of the meeting. I ran away from my friends and stood beside him." She herself seemed surprised by the memories she was recalling. "Since then I've never left him. Not for a single day. Not for even two hours on end, I imagine."

Paterson shot a hasty glance at Mithoerg, hesitated, then murmured in a peculiar tone: "You're his mascot."

She laughed. "Pilot's nicer than you. He calls me his 'guardian angel.' "

Mithoerg hardly heard what they were saying. He was following up in his mind his argument with Jacques. He had no doubt that he himself was in the right. He appreciated Jacques as a *Kamerad*, and had even tried to make a friend of him; but he severely condemned Jacques as a member of the Party. Just now he was feeling a rankling animosity toward him. "I should have flung some home truths in his face," he thought, "once and for all. Under the Pilot's nose—so much the better!" Mithoerg was one of those most disconcerted by Meynestrel's attachment to Jacques. Not from any sordid jealousy; it vexed him, rather, as a sort of injustice. He was sure that just now the Pilot had inwardly been on his side and Meynestrel's equivocal silence had keenly annoyed him. Obsessed by a craving for revenge, he hoped an opportunity would arise for clearing up the matter… .

Meynestrel and Jacques, who were now some distance ahead, halted at the beginning of the Promenade des Bastions, whence a shortcut across the gardens led to the Rue Saint-Ours.

The sun was setting. Behind the railings a golden glow still hovered on the lawns. The close of this fine summer Sunday had drawn a crowd of strollers to the Promenade, which was, like the Luxembourg Gardens at Paris, a favourite resort of university students. All the seats were occupied and young folk in cheerful groups were sauntering up and down the avenues lined with trees, under which a certain coolness lingered in the air.

Leaving Alfreda and the Englishman, Mithoerg walked quickly up to the two men. "Still, it's a rather sordid attitude to life," Jacques was saying, "to make such a fetish of material well-being."

Mithoerg looked him up and down, and deliberately, without an idea of the topic of their conversation, cut across it. "What's he after now? I'll swear he's ranting against the 'sordid materialism' of us revolutionaries!" he snarled aggressively.

Jacques, though a little startled, gazed at him affectionately. He always took the tantrums of his Austrian friend good-humouredly. He regarded Mithoerg as a staunch comrade, as a somewhat demonstrative but exceptionally faithful friend. He had understood that Mithoerg's churlishness was due to the lonely life he led, to an unhappy childhood, and a sensitive pride, under which, he suspected, lurked some latent sense of inferiority or a mind in conflict with itself. Jacques was not mistaken. The sentimental Austrian had a secret grief; conscious of his ugliness, he morbidly exaggerated it to himself, and to such a point that at times he felt utterly desperate.

Indulgently, Jacques explained: "I was telling the Pilot that quite a lot of us have a way of thinking, of feeling, and of insisting on happiness, which is absolutely capitalist. Don't you agree? What does 'being a revolutionary' mean, if not first and foremost that one has a special attitude of mind? That one has begun by bringing about a revolution within oneself, and purged one's mind of all the habits that are relics of the old order?"

Meynestrel cast a quick glance at him. "Purged!" he was thinking. "What a quaint fellow is our little Jacques! He's sloughed his bourgeois skin so effectively, and purged his mind of habits, yes—except of that one habit, the most thoroughly bourgeois of all: the habit of regarding the intellect as the controlling factor."

Jacques was still speaking. "Yes, I'm often struck by the importance, the unconscious respect, that most of us still accord to material comfort."

Obstinate as ever, Mithoerg broke in. "Really now, a little too easy it is to taunt with materialism the poor devil who is starving and revolts because he wants a bite to eat."

"Obviously," Meynestrel commented, and Jacques, too, hastened to assent: "Nothing's more legitimate, Mithoerg, than that sort of revolt. Only, a number of us seem to think that the revolution will have been achieved the day when capitalism has been dethroned and the proletariat's taken its place. But to install a new set of profiteers in the place of those we've driven out wouldn't be destroying the capitalist system but only turning it over to another class. And surely the revolution ought to be something different from a mere class triumph, even though it's the most numerous and most exploited class that's put on top. Personally, I'd like to see a more generous and general triumph, a triumph of humanity in the widest sense—in which all men, without distinction …"

"Obviously," Meynestrel said again.

Mithoerg muttered: "Money-making, that's the curse. Today it's the one driving force behind all human activity. So long as we haven't rooted out that evil thing-"

"That's just what I was coming to," Jacques put in. "Do you think it will be an easy matter to uproot it? When it seems that even *we* can't manage to extricate ourselves from that idea? Even we, the revolutionaries!"

Probably Mithoerg was of the same opinion. But he was not honest enough to own to it. He could no longer resist the temptation of wounding his friend. With a laugh that was like a snarl he sidetracked the question… .

" 'We, the revolutionaries'! But *you*, you've never been a revolutionary."

Startled by this personal attack, Jacques turned instinctively toward Meynestrel. But the Pilot merely smiled, and it was not the comforting smile that Jacques had hoped for. He turned to Mithoerg. "What on earth are you so ratty about?" he stammered.

"A revolutionary," Mithoerg exclaimed, with a bitterness that he now took no pains to conceal, "is a man who *believes!* See? You're a man who thinks things over, blows hot one day and cold another. See? You're someone who has opinions; you're not a man

with a faith. Faith is a gift of heaven, so to speak. It's not for you, *Kamerad*. You have it not, and you'll never have it. No, I know you too well. What you like is wobbling to one side, then to the other. Like the bourgeois taking it easy on his sofa, smoking his pipe, and juggling with the *pros* and the *cons*. Thinking: 'What for a clever boy I am!' You're just like that, *Kamerad*. You rack your brains and reason things out and poke your nose this way and that, to smell out the—the 'fallacies' as you call them. That's your game, all the long day—and mighty clever you think yourself, eh? No, you've no faith!" He had moved nearer Meynestrel. "Isn't that true, Pilot? Had he any right to say 'we revolutionaries'?"

Meynestrel smiled again, briefly, inscrutably.

"But, Mithoerg"—Jacques was feeling more and more at sea—"what exactly have you got against me? That I'm not a bigot? True enough!" Little by little, embarrassment was yielding to anger, and this gradual change of mood gave him a certain satisfaction. He added in a frosty tone: "I'm sorry, but I've just been explaining to the Pilot how I stand. I must confess I don't feel inclined to go over it all again."

"A dilettante, that's what you are!" Mithoerg roared. As always when he flew into a passion, the rush of saliva to his mouth made him splutter out his words. "A ra-rationalist playboy! And, think I, a Protestant. Yes, one downright Protestant. Freedom of thought, of criticism, of moral judgments, and so further. Your sympathies are with us, I grant. But you're not with us striving toward one single end. And think I: The Party has no use for ones like you. Timid folk who always hesitate, and set out to find fault with the Party doctrine instead of fighting like good soldiers for it. We let you people come with us. Perhaps we're wrong. Your mania for reasoning, rationalizing everything, it is catching. And very soon everyone will begin blowing cold and hot, and shillyshally-making, instead of marching *vorwärts* toward the revolution. You are capable for once, perhaps, of doing a hero act, as an individual. But what's that, an individual act? Nothing! A true revolutionary, he should accept not being a hero. He should accept being just a little atom lost in the community. He should accept being—a nobody! He should wait patiently for the signal to be given to all; and only then he stands up and marches with the rest. *Ach*, you, as a philosopher, you may find that sort of obedience shameful for a brain like yours. But I say: to have that sort of obedience one needs a braver, truer, nobler soul than to be a playboy rationalist. And it's only faith can give that courage. The true revolutionary, he has that courage, because he has faith, because he believes with all his heart, without question. Yes, my *Kamerad*, that's so. And you need only look at the Pilot; he says nothing but I know he thinks like me."

Just then Paterson shot forward like an arrow between Mithoerg and Jacques. "Listen! Listen! What are they shouting?"

"What's happened?" Meynestrel asked, with a quick backward glance toward Alfreda.

They had crossed the Promenade and were coming into the Rue Candolle. Three newsboys were running toward them, zigzagging across the road, and yelling at the top of their voices.

"Late special! Political outrage in Austria!"

Mithoerg started. "In Austria?"

Impulsively Paterson dashed toward the nearest boy. But he came back at once, his hand thrust limply into his pocket.

"Haven't *enough* money!" he announced plaintively, smiling, however, at the euphemism "enough."

Meanwhile Mithoerg had bought the paper, and was running his eyes over it. The others clustered around him.

"*Unglaublich!*" He seemed stupefied by the news. He handed the paper to the Pilot.

Rapidly, his voice betraying not the least emotion, Meynestrel read the summary:

> "This morning at Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia, recently annexed to the Austrian Empire, the Austrian heir-apparent Archduke Francis Ferdinand and the Archduchess were murdered by a young Bosnian revolutionary armed with a revolver, during an official ceremony."

"*Unglaublich!*" Mithoerg repeated.

# Chapter X

A FORTNIGHT later, Jacques came back from Vienna by the day express, accompanied by an Austrian named Boehm.

A piece of seriously alarming news that Hosmer had confidentially imparted to him the day before had led him to break off his inquiries and hurry back to Switzerland, to notify Meynestrel.

That same Sunday, July 12, Mithoerg, at the request of Jacques—who was disinclined to face his friends' questions—visited Headquarters at about six in the evening. He ran up the stairs, countered the others' greetings with a vague smile, and, threading his way between the groups crowding the first two rooms, made straight for the third, in which he assumed the Pilot would be found.

And so it turned out; in his usual seat beside Alfreda, facing a dozen attentive listeners, Meynestrel was holding forth. His remarks seemed to be directed more particularly to Prezel, who stood in the front row.

"Anti-clericalism?" he was saying. "Wretched tactics. See what happened to your Bismarck, with his famous Kulturkampf… . His persecutions only served to strengthen German clericalism."

All anxiety, Mithoerg was trying his hardest to catch Alfreda's eye. He managed at last to make a sign to her and moved away to the window.

Prezel had put up some objection, which Mithoerg failed to catch. Various interruptions rang out, and some members of the group changed places and began talking among themselves. Alfreda took advantage of this to come and join the Austrian.

Meynestrel's incisive voice made itself heard anew. "To my mind, it won't be that pig-headed anti-clericalism, so dear to the free-thinking bourgeois of the nineteenth century, which will free the masses from the yoke of religion. Here again the problem is a social one. The foundations of religions are of a social character. From the earliest ages religions have derived their chief force from the sufferings of oppressed mankind. Poverty has always been the mainstay of religion. Once that prop is gone, faith will steadily decline. When a happier era dawns, the existing religions will lose their hold on men."

"What is it, Mithoerg?" Alfreda asked in a low tone.

"Thibault's back. He wants to see the Pilot."

"Why didn't he come straight here?"

"It seems there's trouble brewing over there."

"Trouble?"

She scanned the Austrian's face intently. She was thinking of Jacques's mission in Vienna.

Mithoerg threw out his arms, as though to say he knew nothing definite. For a while he stood thus, his eyebrows raised, his eyes goggling behind the glasses, and the upper part of his body swaying clumsily, like a bear-cub standing on its hind legs.

"Thibault is with Boehm, a countryman of mine, who is leaving tomorrow for Paris. Terribly important it is that the Pilot shall see them tonight."

"Tonight?" Alfreda was thinking things over. "Very well, come round to our place; that's the best way."

"All right. Tell Richardley to come too."

"I'll tell Pat as well," she added hurriedly.

Mithoerg, who disliked the Englishman, was on the point of saying: "Why Pat?" He signified assent, however, with a flicker of his eyelids.

"At nine?"

"Yes."

Without another word the girl went back to her seat.

Meynestrel had just cut Prezel short with an emphatic "Of course!" After a moment he spoke again. "The change won't be brought to pass in a day. Nor in one generation. But the religious impulses of the new humanity will find an outlet, a social outlet. For the mystical aspirations of institutional religion, social aspirations will be substituted. Yes, the problem is of a social order."

After catching Alfreda's eye again, Mithoerg slipped out… .

Three hours later, accompanied by Boehm and Mithoerg, Jacques alighted from the Carouge tram and proceeded on foot to Meynestrel's house.

Night had almost fallen, and the little staircase was in darkness.

Alfreda opened the door.

Meynestrel's dark form was outlined, like a figure in a shadow-play, against the background of the lighted room. He took a quick step toward Jacques and asked in a low voice: "Anything new?"

"Yes."

"Were the charges justified?"

"To a considerable extent," Jacques whispered. "Particularly as regards Tobler. I'll tell you about it later on… . But there's something else I have to tell you first. We're on the eve of very serious events." He turned to the Austrian whom he had brought in with him, and added by way of introduction: "Comrade Boehm."

Meynestrel held out his hand. "So that's it, Comrade Boehm," he said with a hint of scepticism in his voice, "you've important news to give us?"

Boehm met his eyes squarely. "Yes."

Boehm was a Tirolese, a little man in the thirties, with a determined face. He wore a cap and, despite the heat, an old yellow raincoat hung on his stalwart shoulders.

"Walk in," Meynestrel said, showing the newcomers into the room, at the far end of which Paterson and Richardley were awaiting them.

Meynestrel introduced the two men to Boehm. The latter became aware that he had kept his cap on. This flustered him for a moment; then he took it off. He wore stout hobnailed shoes which skidded on the heavily waxed floor.

Alfreda, with Pat's help, brought in some chairs from the kitchen and placed them in a circle round the bed, on which she seated herself, her notebook and pencil held primly in her lap.

Paterson sat down at her side. Reclining with his elbow on the bolster, he leaned toward her. "Any idea what they're going to say?"

Alfreda made an evasive gesture. Past experience had led her to mistrust such conspiratorial airs. As indulged in by these men of action doomed for the while to inactivity, they were no more than symptoms of an overmastering desire, perpetually frustrated, for the day to dawn when at last they could display their mettle.

"Shove up a bit," Richardley said in a familiar tone, seating himself beside the girl. A blithe, almost martial fervour shone in his eyes; but there was something artificial in his bravado, as if he deliberately set up to appear strong-minded, well pleased with things, no matter what happened—on principle, to keep himself in trim.

From his pocket Jacques drew two sealed envelopes, a big one and a small one, which he handed to Meynestrel.

"Those are copies of documents. This is a letter from Hosmer."

The Pilot moved across to the one lamp in the room; it was placed on the table and gave out a dim light. He opened the letter, read it, and instinctively looked round at Alfreda. Then, after flashing a keen, questioning glance at Jacques, he laid the two envelopes on the table, and sat down—to encourage the others to do likewise.

When all seven of them were seated, he turned to Jacques.

"Well?"

Jacques glanced at Boehm, dashed the rebellious lock of hair from his forehead, and said to the Pilot: "You've read Hosmer's letter. Sarajevo, the murder of the Archduke. It all happened just a fortnight ago. Well, during that fortnight there's occurred in Europe, and particularly in Austria, a succession of events that have been kept secret. Events of such tremendous importance that Hosmer considered it necessary to give warning immediately to every Socialist centre in Europe. He dispatched comrades to St. Petersburg, to Rome. Bühlmann has left for Berlin. Morelli has been to see Olekhanov, and Lenin as well."

"Lenin's a dissident," Richardley murmured.

"Boehm will be in Paris tomorrow," Jacques continued, taking no notice of the interruption. "He will be at Brussels by Wednesday; in London on Friday. As for me, I've been deputed to explain matters to you. Because events really seem to be moving fast. Hosmer, when leaving me, said—these are his very words: 'Be sure and explain to them that if things are allowed to drift, Europe within two or three months may be involved in a world war.' "

"On account of the murder of an Archduke?" Richardley sounded sceptical.

"On account of an Archduke killed by Servians; by Slavs, that is to say," Jacques went on, turning toward him. "I was like you: miles and miles from having the slightest inkling. But out there, I realized. . , . Anyhow, I had a glimpse of the problem—and it's infernally complicated."

He stopped speaking, looked round the room, then fixed his eyes on Meynestrel and inquired hesitatingly: "Shall I tell it all, from the beginning, as Hosmer explained it to me?"

"Certainly."

"I suppose you know," Jacques began at once, "the efforts made by Austria to create a new Balkan League? … What's that?" he added, noticing that Boehm was fidgeting on his chair.

"I think," Boehm said in a slow voice, "that if you want to explain the situation in the light of its causes, the best method would be to go back a little further in your analysis."

On hearing the word "method," Jacques smiled. He glanced inquiringly at the Pilot.

"We have the whole night before us," Meynestrel remarked with a quick smile; then stretched out his stiff leg in front of him.

"Look here," Jacques said, turning toward Boehm, "you do the job. You'll certainly make a better business of a general historical survey than I would."

"Yes, of course," Boehm said in all seriousness—which brought a mischievous sparkle to Alfreda's eyes.

He let the raincoat drop from his shoulders, carefully laid it out on the floor beside his cap, and drew himself forward to the extreme edge of his chair, in which position he remained, the upper part of his body stiffly erect and his knees wedged together. The close-cropped hair made his head look round as a billiard-ball.

"You must excuse me," he said. "As a start, I shall have to deal with the point of view of our imperialist ideology. That's the only way to bring out the underlying trend of Austrian policy. To begin with," he went on after a moment's reflection, "one should know what the Southern Slavs are after."

"The Southern Slavs," Mithoerg put in, "consist of Servia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also the Hungarian Slavs."

Meynestrel, who had been listening with the closest attention, nodded approval.

Boehm went on with his discourse.

"These Southern Slavs have been trying for the last fifty years to join forces against us. The nucleus of the movement is Servia. The idea is to gather round Servia for the purpose of building up an independent Yugoslav state. In this they have the backing of Russia. Since 1878 and the Berlin Congress, there has been a ferocious enmity, a struggle to the death going on between Russian Pan-Slavism and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And Pan-Slavism is all-powerful in the minds of the leaders of Russia. Still, as regards the secret intentions of Russia and her responsibility for the coming troubles, I'm not sufficiently informed, I can't venture to express an opinion. I will only speak of my own country. As for Austria—and here I take the viewpoint of the imperialist government—it's only fair to say that this coalition of the Southern Slavs is a genuinely vital problem. If a Yugoslav coalition were set up at our borders, Austria would lose control of the numerous Slavs who are now incorporated in the Empire."

"Obviously," Meynestrel muttered mechanically; then, seeming to regret this involuntary interruption, he gave a slight cough.

"Down to 1903," Boehm went on, "Servia was under Austrian rule. But in 1903 Servia staged a nationalist revolution, set Karageorgevitch on the throne, and gained her independence. Austria waited for an opportunity to get even with her. And so, in 1908, we took advantage of the fact that Japan had dealt Russia a blow, and we coolly annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, a province handed over for our administration. Germany and Italy were consenting parties. Servia was furious. Then came the second Balkan War. Last year. You remember? Servia had gained new territory in Macedonia. Austria wanted to put her foot down. She'd brought it off on two occasions by sheer boldness. But this time Germany and Italy didn't back her, and Servia was able to stand her ground and keep her

winnings. So far, so good. But Austria has felt bitterly humiliated ever since. She's biding her time to take revenge. National pride is very strong with us. Our General Staff is hard at work engineering that revenge. So are our diplomats. Thibault was speaking of the new Balkan League. That, in my country, stands in the forefront of the year's political programme. This is what it consists of: a projected alliance between Austria, Bulgaria, and Rumania, so as to form a new Balkan League to work against the Slavs. Not only against our Southern Slavs, but against *all* Slavs. Do you see the point? That means against Russia as well."

He paused to collect his thoughts and make sure he had omitted nothing essential. Then he turned toward Jacques, as if asking for his impression.

Alfreda, who was leaning back on Paterson's shoulder, bent her head to stifle a yawn. She found the Austrian terribly long-winded and this history lecture more than tiresome.

"Of course," Jacques put in, "whenever you think of Austria, you mustn't lose sight of the Austro-German *bloc*. Of Germany and her 'future on the sea,' which brings her into conflict with England. Of Germany, commercially encircled, and on the lookout for new openings. The Germany of the *Drang nach Osten*. Germany and her designs on Turkey, her plans to cut off Russia from the Straits; her interests in the Baghdad Railway, the Persian Gulf, England's oilfields, the road to India, and the rest of it. It all hangs together. In the background, dominating the situation, always we find the same two groups of capitalist powers up against each other."

"Obviously," Meynestrel put in.

Boehm nodded his assent.

A pause fell on the conversation.

At last the Austrian turned toward the Pilot and inquired with the utmost gravity: "Have I put it correctly?"

"You've made it very clear," Meynestrel declared emphatically.

Praise from the Pilot was unusual, and all except Boehm were surprised. Alfreda suddenly changed her mind and began looking at the Austrian with more attention.

"Now," Meynestrel proceeded, fixing his eyes on Jacques and leaning back slightly in his chair, "let's hear what Hosmer has discovered, and what these new factors are."

"New factors?" Jacques began. "Well, not precisely that. Not yet anyhow. Merely symptoms."

He drew himself up with a quick movement that brought his forehead into shadow, and now the yellow lamplight fell only on the lower part of his face, the prominent under-jaw and the wide mouth flanked with lines of anxiety.

"Ominous symptoms that point—in the near future, very likely—to startling events. To be brief: on the Servian side, a deep-seated popular irritation, due to the constant frustration of their national ambitions; on the Russian side, an obvious tendency to back up the claims of the Slavs. So true is this that immediately after the murder of the Archduke, the Russian government, which is entirely under the thumb of the General Staff and nationalist elements, allowed it to be stated by their ambassadors that they would take a definite stand as the protectors of Servia. Hosmer was made aware of this by information received from London. On the Austrian side, there's bitter mortification in government circles over their recent failures, and serious anxiety as regards the future. In Hosmer's words, we are putting out into the unknown, freighted with a high-explosive cargo of hatred, spite, and greed. The unknown begins with that dramatic event of June 28, the Sarajevo assassination. Sarajevo's a Bosnian town, the population of which, after six years of annexation to Austria, has remained loyal to Servia. Hosmer, personally, is rather inclined to think that certain official Servian leaders directly or indirectly helped to promote the crime. But proof of this is hard to find. In the view of the Austrian government, the murder, thanks to the indignation it has aroused throughout Europe, provides an unhoped-for opportunity. To catch Servia red-handed. To settle her hash, once for all! To restore the prestige of Austria and, at one and the same time, to clinch the new Balkan League and thus enforce the hegemony of Austria in Central Europe! Rather a tempting prospect, isn't it, for the statesmen concerned? In Vienna, accordingly, there was no hesitation among the leaders. A plan of action was worked out forthwith.

"The first thing was to prove Servia's complicity in the outrage. Vienna promptly ordered an official investigation to be started at Belgrade and throughout the Kingdom of Servia. Evidence had to be unearthed at all costs. Up to the present, however, this first item of the programme seems to have been too much for them. The most it has proved possible to do is to ascertain the names of a few Servian officers mixed up in the anti-Austrian movement in Bosnia. In spite of the urgent orders they've received, the investigators have not been able to return a verdict of 'Guilty' against the Servian government. Naturally their report was suppressed. It was carefully withheld from the press. But Hosmer has been able to procure the findings. They are here," he added, putting his hand on the big envelope still lying on the table, its red seals glowing in the lamplight.

Meynestrel's thoughtful gaze rested for a moment on the envelope; then again he turned to Jacques, who went on speaking. "What did the Austrian government do? They ignored the report. That in itself would be enough to prove that they had some secret end in view. They've allowed it to be thought—indeed they've allowed it to be published—that the guilt of Servia is a proved fact. The official press has kept on working up the feelings of the public. In that particular murder they had a trump card. Mithoerg and Boehm can tell you about it. Over there, the person of the heir to the throne is sacred in the eyes of the people. At the present moment there's not an Austrian, not a Hungarian, but is satisfied that the Sarajevo murder was the outcome of a plot promoted by the Servian government and perhaps by the Russian government too, as a protest against the annexation of Bosnia. There's not one of them but feels aggrieved and is eager for vengeance. That's exactly what was wanted in high circles. From the day following the crime everything possible was done to keep the national pride at fever-pitch."

"By whom, do you think?" Meynestrel asked.

"By those in office. First and foremost by the Foreign Minister, Berchtold."

Here Boehm cut in. "*Ach*, Berchtold!" He made a significant grimace. "To be able to understand all this, you've got to know that fine gentleman and his ambitions, as we do! Just think! To crush Servia would make him the Bismarck of *Österreich!* On two occasions, already, he fancied he'd succeeded. Both times the opportunity slipped through his fingers. This time he feels the chances are favourable. They mustn't be allowed to peter out."

"Still, Berchtold isn't Austria," Richardley demurred, peaking his sharp nose toward Boehm with a smile. In every inflexion of his voice there could be detected that sense of heart-felt, thoroughgoing security which those who are young derive from the possession of a coherent doctrine, a settled view of life.

"*Ach*," Boehm retorted, "but he has the whole of Austria in his pocket! In the first place the General Staff, and then the Emperor as well."

Richardley shook his head. "Franz Josef? That's a bit hard to swallow. How old exactly is he?"

"He's eighty-four years old," Boehm replied.

"Just so. An old dodderer. With two unsuccessful wars behind him. Yet he's willing, you say, at the end of his reign, to embark with a light heart on another one!"

"Don't forget, though," Mithoerg exclaimed, "that he realizes the monarchy, she is in mortal danger! Old as he is, the Emperor is not truly certain he will still his crown be wearing when he goes down to the grave."

Jacques rose to his feet. "Austria, Richardley, is at grips with her domestic problems, and they're very serious ones. Don't forget that. She's a nation made up of eight or nine ill-assorted, rival races. And the central authority is growing weaker all the time. It looks as if Austria's bound to fall in pieces one of these days. All those groups of people forcibly incorporated with the Empire—Servians, Rumanians, Italians, and so on—are seething with unrest; they're only waiting for a favourable opportunity to shake off the yoke. I've just come back from there. In political circles, both on the right and on the left, the prevailing view is that there's only one alternative to a complete break-up, and that is war. That's the opinion of Berchtold and his gang. And of course the generals take the same line."

"For the last eight years," Boehm observed, "we have had as Chief of the General Staff Conrad von Hôtzendorf, the tool of the military party and the bitterest enemy of the Slavs. For the last eight years he has made no secret of his war-mongering activities."

Richardley did not seem impressed. With his arms folded, bright-eyed—too bright, indeed—he watched each speaker in turn, with the same complacent air of knowingness and scepticism.

Jacques ceased to address his remarks to him and, going back to his chair, turned toward Meynestrel.

"Consequently," he went on, "in the opinion of the leaders over there a preventive war would save the Empire. It would put an end to all party dissension, an end to the agitation of all those unassimilated nationalities. A war would restore to Austria her economic prosperity and secure for her the Balkan market which the Russians are trying to monopolize. And as they claim to be able to bring Servia to her knees within two or three weeks, what risks do they run?"

"That's as may be!" Meynestrel rapped out.

The eyes of all swung round toward him. With sombre, far-away air he was staring at some vague point in Alfreda's direction.

"But that's not all… ." Jacques resumed.

"There's Russia!" Richardley broke in. "And then there's Germany. Let's suppose, just for a minute, that Austria attacks Servia; and let's suppose—a thing that isn't certain, but quite in the cards—that Russia intervenes. Mobilization by Russia means an immediate mobilization in Germany, automatically followed by one in France. The whole of their charming system of alliances comes into play; it's a foregone conclusion. Which is as much as to say that a war between Austria and Servia would as likely as not lead to a world-wide conflict." He glanced at Jacques and smiled. "And that, old man, Germany knows better than we do ourselves. Is it likely, then, that by allowing the Austrian government to have their way Germany would deliberately incur the risk of launching a European war? No. Just think it out. The risk is so tremendous that Germany will prevent Austria from taking action."

Jacques's face had grown tense.

"Wait a bit," he said. "That's just what justifies Hosmer's cry of alarm. There are strong reasons for believing Germany has already pledged her help to Austria."

Meynestrel gave a start. He kept his eyes riveted on Jacques.

"This," Jacques went on, "is how it came about, in Hosmer's opinion. It would seem, in the first place, that in Vienna, during the first few days after the murder, Berchtold met with opposition in two distinct quarters: from Tisza, the Hungarian Minister of State, a cautious man with no liking for mailed-fist methods; and from the Emperor. Yes; it seems that Emperor Franz Josef was reluctant to give his consent; he wanted to know, before doing so, what Wilhelm II would think of the matter. Now the Kaiser was just off on a cruise. No time to be lost, if he was to be reached. It now looks as though, some time between July 4 and 7, Berchtold managed to consult the Kaiser and his Chancellor and to obtain Germany's consent."

"Mere assumptions," Richardley declared.

"Obviously," Jacques admitted. "But what gives weight to those assumptions is what has been happening in Vienna during the last five days. Let's go into that. Last week, even in Berchtold's set, there still appeared to be a certain amount of hesitation; no secret was made of the fact that the Emperor—indeed Berchtold himself—feared that Germany would object. All of a sudden, on the seventh, there was a complete change. That day (last Tuesday, to be exact) a big cabinet council, a council of war in fact, was called in haste. As if they had suddenly been given a free hand. As regards what was said at that council, there was complete silence for forty-eight hours. But no later than two days ago, things began to leak out; too many different people had been let into the secret, as a result of the various steps decided on at the meeting. I might add that Hosmer has fixed up a wonderful intelligence service of his own in Vienna. Hosmer always gets to know everything in the end! Well, at that council Berchtold's bearing was quite different; it was as though he had a definite assurance in his pocket that Germany would give unlimited support to a punitive expedition against Servia. And he coolly submitted to his colleagues a regular war plan, which Tisza alone opposed. The best proof that Berchtold's plan is actually a war plan is that Tisza urged his colleagues to be content with merely humiliating Servia; he thought it would be good enough to win a brilliant diplomatic victory. Well, he had the entire council against him, and in the end he gave in, he came round to the others' way of thinking. What's more, Hosmer stated positively that that same morning the ministers quite calmly discussed the question of ordering immediate mobilization. If they refrained from doing so, it was solely because they thought it wiser, *vis-a-vis* the other powers, not to drop the mask till the last moment. One thing's certain: the plan put forward by Berchtold and the General Staff has been adopted.

"For obvious reasons it's hard to know exactly what that plan is. Still, some things are already known. For instance, that orders have been issued to set on foot such military preparations as can be made without unduly attracting attention, and that covering forces on the Austro-Servian frontier are being held in readiness. Within a few hours, at the first pretext that crops up, they'll occupy Belgrade." He ran his fingers quickly through his hair. "And, to wind up, I'll quote something that an assistant of the Chief of Staff, the egregious Hôtzendorf, is reported to have said to some friends. Perhaps it's only a piece of bragging indulged in by an old trooper; still, it's indicative of the Austrian leaders' frame of mind. 'The nations of Europe, one fine morning before long, will wake up to face a fait accompli!'"

# Chapter XI

Jacques fell silent, and at once all eyes converged upon the Pilot. He stood motionless, his arms folded, his pupils set and shining.

For a while there was silence in the room. The same anxiety, above all the same bewilderment, was manifest on every face.

At last Mithoerg's gruff voice broke the silence. "*Unglaublich!*"

There was another pause.

Richardley said at last, in a low tone: "If really Germany's behind it all …!"

The Pilot's keen eyes shifted toward the speaker, but did not seem to be observing him. His lips moved, and an incomprehensible sound broke from him. Alfreda, whose eyes had never left his face, was the only one to catch what he had said.

"Too soon!"

She shuddered, and unthinkingly nestled against Paterson's shoulder.

The Englishman gave her a quick glance, but, bending her head, she shunned the question in his eyes. Indeed, she would have been at a loss, should Pat have asked her, to explain that shudder. It was so clearly the first time, this evening, that war, till now a mere abstraction, had forced itself upon her imagination in such bold relief, with all its brutal realism. Yet it was not Jacques's revelations that had caused her to shudder; it was Meynestrel's "Too soon!" Why? The remark was not one to surprise her. She was quite aware of the Pilot's belief that revolution could come only of a violent crisis; that in the actual state of Europe war was the most likely occasion for such a crisis; but, even if war broke out, the proletariat, being insufficiently trained, would not be in a position to transform an imperialist war into a revolution. Was it this that had upset her, the idea that if socialism were really unprepared for it a war would mean mere fruitless slaughter? Or had it been the tone of that "Too soon!"? Yet there was nothing new to her in it. Had she not long been inured to her Pilot's lack of humane feelings? One day he had surprised her into saying: "Your attitude toward war is just that of the Christians toward death; their minds are so engrossed with what is to come after, that they seem blind to the horrors of the act of dying." He had laughed. "To a doctor, little girl, the pains of childbirth are just part of the scheme of things."

She had brought herself, painful though it sometimes was, to admire this deliberate detachment as the outcome of the strenuous and constant strivings of a man of whose very human weaknesses none was more aware than she. Indeed it raised him, in her eyes, above the rest of them. And it always moved her deeply to think that this "dehumanizing" process was prompted, after all, by a supremely human ideal: to serve mankind more fully and to work more efficiently for the destruction of present social conditions, for the coming of a better world. Why that shudder, then? She could not tell. Her long eyelashes lifted, and her glance, slipping over Paterson's head, came to rest on Meynestrel with a look of trust. "I must wait," she thought. "He's hardly said anything, so far. He's going to explain. And then everything will be cleared up, and I shall see again how right and how splendid he is!"

"That Austrian and German *Militarismus*, they want war, I'm quite convinced," Mithoerg put in, with a toss of his shaggy head. "And that that *Militarismus* has the backing of many German leaders, of the big business, of Krupp's, and of all the supporters of the *Drang nach Osten*, I can also quite believe. But as to the whole of the propertied class, neinl They will get the fright. Their influence is great. They won't let the militarists have their way. They will say to the governments: 'Stop! It's madness. If you touch off that dynamite, you shall all blow up at the same time!' "

"But look here, Mithoerg," Jacques said, "if really the leaders and their military parties *are* hand in glove about this war, what will the opposition of your propertied classes amount to? And if you accept Hosmer's information, they are hand in glove."

"No one questions that information," Richardley broke in. "But all that can be said so far is that there's a *threat* of war. Nothing more. Well, what is actually behind that threat? Is it a real desire for war? Or is it only another bluff on the part of the German Chancelleries?"

"I don't think there's any risk of a war," Paterson declared stolidly. "You're forgetting my country, good old England! She'll never allow the Triple Alliance to become all-powerful in Europe." He was smiling now. "She sits tight, does England; that's why people forget all about her. But she's listening, watching all the time, and if things take a turn that doesn't suit her, she'll get a move on, sure enough. There's lots of life in the old girl yet, you know! She has her cold bath every morning and she does her daily dozen!"

Jacques was fidgeting impatiently.

"You can't get over the facts. Whether there's a real desire for war, or whether it's only bluff, Europe will be up against an alarming situation within a day or two. Well, what are *we* to do about it? I agree with Hosmer. We must make a stand against the war-mongers. More than that, we must at once prepare our counter-attack."

"Yes, yes, I agree!" cried Mithoerg.

Jacques turned toward Meynestrel, but was unable to catch his eye. He looked inquiringly at Richardley, who nodded approval, and murmured: "I too agree."

Richardley declined to believe there was any real danger of war. Still, he did not question the fact that this sudden threat of it must cause a general upheaval in Europe, and he had promptly seen to what account the Socialist International could turn the situation. It would serve at once to rally the antiwar forces and stimulate the revolutionary ideal.

Jacques spoke again. "As Hosmer puts it, the threat of a European war provides us with a new and definite objective. What we've got to do is to take up again the programme we sketched out two years ago in connexion with the Balkan War, and to improve on it. To find out, in the first place, whether there's any chance of holding the Vienna Congress at an earlier date. Then we've got to set on foot at once, in every country at the same moment, a peace campaign, working through official channels and with the utmost publicity. Speeches in the Reichstag, in the Chamber of Deputies, in the Duma. Simultaneous pressure brought to bear on all Foreign Ministers. Action by the press. An appeal to the nations. Mass demonstrations."

"And dangle the bogy of a general strike before the governments," Richardley put in.

"With lots of sabotage in the war factories!" barked Mithoerg. "And bust up the locomotives and cut the fishplates along the railroads, like they did in Italy!"

There was an exchange of thrilled glances. Had "zero hour" struck at last?

Jacques turned again toward the Pilot. A bright, fleeting, frigid smile, which Jacques took for a sign of acquiescence, flashed across Meynestrel's features like the beam of a searchlight. Suddenly elated, Jacques went on eagerly. "The strike, of course! A general, simultaneous strike! That's our trump card. Hosmer's afraid the matter may be dealt with at Vienna on purely theoretical lines. It's up to us to go into it again, from the start, on fresh lines. Cut out mere theory. Define for each country the attitude to be adopted in such and such a case. Avoid a repetition of that muddle we made at Basel. We must make sure this time of concrete, practical results. Am I not right, Pilot? Hosmer would even like to get the leaders to organize preparatory meetings before the actual Congress. So as to clear the ground and to show the governments, right away, that the proletariat is fully determined, this time, to stand up as one man against their bellicose policies."

Mithoerg laughed derisively.

"*Ach!* You and your leaders! What do you expect from the leaders? For how many years have they been talking about the strike? And do you suppose that this time at Vienna they'll do any more than talk?"

"The times have changed," Jacques observed. "There's the threat of a European conflagration."

"No, no, cut out the leaders! Cut out speeches. Direct action by the masses, that's the stuff! Mass action, comrade!"

"That goes without saying," Jacques rejoined. "Only, if you want direct action, isn't it terribly important that the leaders should begin by declaring themselves plainly and emphatically? Just think, Mithoerg, what an encouragement that would be for the masses! Ah, Pilot, if only we had it now, that one world-wide international newspaper!"

"*Träumerei!*" Mithoerg shouted. "What I say is: a fig for your leaders; work upon the masses! D'you suppose the German leaders, for instance, would ever agree to the strike? Not on your life! They'd say, as they did at Basel: '*Unmöglich*, on account of Russia.' "

"That would be disastrous," Richardley observed. "Really disastrous. So in the last analysis, everything depends upon Germany, upon the Social-Democrats."

"Anyhow," Jacques said, "they showed two years ago that they're quite able, when necessary, to make a stand against war. But for them, that Balkan affair would have set all Europe ablaze."

"Don't say 'but for them'; say 'but for the masses.' As for them, what did they do? Just follow the masses' lead."

"But who was it organized the demonstrations of the masses? The leaders," Jacques retorted.

Boehm shook his head. "So long as you have not even two million wage-earners in Russia, and millions upon millions of mujiks, the proletariat can't be strong enough to rise against the government, and the Tsarist *Militarismus* is a real menace for Germany, and the Social-Democrats can't guarantee a strike. Mithoerg is right; at the Vienna Congress they'll only agree 'in principle,' as they did at Basel."

"*Ach!* Do cut off your congresses!" Mithoerg exclaimed petulantly. "What I say is: again this time it's action by the masses which will carry the day. The leaders will follow. What has to be done is to get the workers to rise everywhere, in Austria, in Germany, in France, without waiting for their leaders to give orders. To get together the good men at every street corner, to make troubles all over the country, in the railways, in armament factories, in the dockyards. Everywhere! And force like that the hands of the labour leaders. And in the same time we must set alight every revolutionary organization in Europe. Sure I am that the Pilot, he thinks like I do! Stir up troubles upon all sides. In Austria first, as being the easiest. *Nicht wahr*, Boehm? Excite still more all the nationalist plotters, the Magyars, the Poles, the Czechs. Also the Hungarians and Rumanians. And do the same all places at once. We can work up again the strikes in Italy. Also in Russia. And if once the masses everywhere are in revolt, the leaders, they will—how do you say it?—toe the lines!" He turned to the Pilot. "Isn't that so, Pilot?"

Thus challenged, Meynestrel raised his head. The sharp glance he shot at Mithoerg and then at Jacques wandered off in the direction of the bed, on which Alfreda was still sitting between Richardley and Paterson.

"Oh, Pilot," Jacques exclaimed, "if only we pull it off this time, what a marvellous access of strength it will mean for the International!"

Meynestrel's reply was: "Obviously."

A hint of irony, so fleeting that it required Alfreda's watchful eyes to notice it, played on the corners of his lips. Apprised of Hosmer's revelations and the strong reasons for believing Germany would support the aims of Austria, he had said at once to himself: "Here it comes, that war of theirs! It's odds on their bringing it off this time. And we're not ready; we've not the slightest hope of coming into power in any country in Europe. What's to be done, then?" His mind was at once made up. "There's no doubt whatever as to the proper course to adopt. We must play on the pacifism of the people for all we're worth. As things are, that's the best means at our disposal for getting a hold over the masses. A war against war! If it breaks out, we've got to convince the greatest possible number of the men who go to the front that this war has been let loose on the world by capital, against the will and against the interests of the workers. They must believe they're being driven helplessly into a fratricidal struggle for criminal ends. That seed, at least, will certainly bear fruit, whatever happens. Rather a neat idea, that—infecting capitalism with a germ that will destroy it! What's more, the war will be an excellent occasion for bringing our leaders into the limelight and compromising them thoroughly in the eyes of the powers that be, by obliging them to commit themselves up to the hilt. So carry on, my young friends! Sound the trumpet of pacifism for all you're worth! It's what you want to do, anyhow. We've only got to let you have your head." He smiled inwardly, picturing to himself the generous effusions of the peacemakers and Socialist-minded enthusiasts of every complexion. Already he seemed to hear the high-pitched, emotional appeals of the star speakers at the leftwing demonstrations. Then, "As for us," he murmured to himself, "and as for me …" He left the thought unfinished. There would always be time for him to come back to it.

Half aloud he said: "That's as may be."

He met Alfreda's earnest gaze and realized that all the others had fallen silent, gazing at him, waiting for him to speak at last. Without thinking, he repeated in a louder voice: "That's as may be." With a movement of impatience he drew back his leg under his chair, and gave a slight cough. "I've nothing more to say. I agree with Hosmer. I agree with Thibault, and Mithoerg, and the rest of you."

Running his hand over his clammy forehead, he stood up abruptly.

In the low-ceiled room, crowded with seats, he looked taller than his wont. He took a few desultory steps along the narrow space left free between the table, the bed, and the legs of his seated visitors. His eyes roamed over the faces of those present, settling on none individually.

After pacing to and fro for a few moments without speaking, he halted. His thoughts seemed homing back from a far country of the mind. They were all convinced he was going to sit down again, to set forth a plan of action, to launch out into one of those forceful, rather cryptic extempore speeches to which he had accustomed them. But he merely murmured: “All that remains to be seen.” With his eyes on the floor, smiling, he made haste to add: “And all that, of course, brings us nearer to our goal.”

Then, threading his way alongside the table, he stepped to the window, pushed open the shutters, and gazed out into the darkness. Bending his head a little, he added in an altogether different tone, speaking over his shoulder: “How about getting us some nice cool drinks, little girl?”

Obediently Alfreda slipped out into the kitchen.

There was a feeling of constraint in the air. Paterson and Richardley were talking in undertones, still seated on the bed. In the middle of the room the two Austrians stood arguing in German. Boehm extracted a half-smoked cigar from his pocket and proceeded to relight it; his prominent under-lip, moist and full-blooded, gave his flat face a good-natured expression, yet at the same time a look of rather gross sensuality which made him seem different from the others.

Leaning forward with both hands on the table, Meynestrel was rereading Hosmer’s letter, which he had spread out under the lamp. The light issuing from the top of the shade threw his features into bold relief; his short beard seemed blacker than ever, his complexion paler; his brows were knitted and the eyelids almost completely veiled the pupils.

Jacques nudged his elbow. “Well, Pilot, our chance of making good has come, and sooner than you expected.”

Meynestrel nodded. Without looking up at Jacques, impassive as ever, he agreed in a flat, perfectly toneless voice: “Obviously,” and proceeded quietly with his reading.

Jacques had a sudden feeling of discomfiture; it struck him that this evening a subtle change had come not only over the Pilot’s expression, but over the Pilot’s bearing toward himself.

Boehm, who had to catch a train early next morning, was the first to make a move. The others followed suit and filed out after him, with a vague sense of relief.

Meynestrel went downstairs with them to open the street door.

# Chapter XII

LEANING over the banisters, Alfreda listened till the sound of voices had died away. Then she went back to the flat and began tidying up. But her heart was heavy and after a moment she crossed the hall to the kitchen, which was in darkness, and, resting her arms on the windowsill, gazed out into the night.

"Daydreaming, little girl?" Meynestrel's dry, feverish hand fondled her shoulder.

She shivered, then all at once asked in a frightened, childish voice: "Do you really think, dear, there's going to be a war?"

He laughed. She felt all her hopes foundering. "But surely we—?"

"We? We're not ready."

"Not ready?" She misunderstood him, for that night all her thoughts turned on the struggle to avert a war. "Do you really believe there's no way of preventing it?"

"There's no preventing it. That goes without saying!" he exclaimed. Any theory that the working class, as it then was, could check the forces making for war struck him as absurd.

She guessed that in the shadow he was smiling, his eyes glittering. Again she shuddered. For some moments they stood in silence, pressing against each other.

"But," she suggested, "mightn't Pat be right? Even if we can't do anything, there's England… ."

"England? All your precious England can do is to postpone matters—and perhaps not even that!" Probably because he had detected an unaccustomed stubbornness in her attitude, the Pilot's tone grew still curter. "Anyhow, that's not the point. The important thing isn't to prevent war."

She half rose, and turned toward him. "Then why ever didn't you tell them so?"

"Because, for the moment, that's nobody's business, little girl. And because, just now, for practical reasons we've got to act as if that *was* the important thing."

She said nothing, but that night she felt hurt, stung to the quick—never had he so wounded her before—and up in arms against him, she knew not why. And it came back to her how once, in the early days of their liaison, he had flung at her, all in one breath, with an impatient shrug: "Love? For us, that hasn't the least importance."

What, she wondered, had any importance for him? Nothing, nothing except the revolution. And for the first time she thought: "It's an obsession with him, the revolution. He doesn't care a rap about anything else; not about me or about my life as a human being, a woman. Nothing else counts with him; not even the fact of being what he is—something different from other men." It was the first time she had thought of him as merely "different," and not superior, nobler than the rest of mankind.

Meynestrel went on speaking, in an ironic tone. "A war on war, little girl! Weil, let them carry on! Let them have their fill of stop-the-war meetings, strikes, and demonstrations. Forward, the peace brigade! Forward, the trumpeters! Let them bring down the walls of Jericho—if they can!"

Suddenly he drew away from her, spun round, and muttered between his teeth: "But it's not their trumpets that will bring those walls down, little girl; it's our bombs!"

And as he limped away toward their bedroom she heard that breathless little chuckle that always froze her heart.

For a long while she remained leaning at the window, gazing out into the darkness. Faint sounds of rippling water came from the Arve, across the silent quay, and the last lights in the houses on the riverside died out one by one.

She did not move. Asked what her thoughts were, she would have replied she had none. But two tears had welled up along her eyelids, and hung trembling between the lashes.

# Chapter XIII

AFTER crossing the Esplanade des Invalides, the car swung round into the Rue de l'Université. It moved silently, but so deserted were the streets under the blazing sun, so deeply sunk was Paris in its Sunday afternoon siesta, that the mild warning of the horn at the street crossings, even the sleek rustle of tires on the hot asphalt, seemed an indiscretion, an outrage on the stillness.

When the car had crossed the Rue du Bac, Anne de Battaincourt lifted her Pekinese from the seat beside her, where it had been sleeping curled up in a ball, and, leaning forward, gently prodded with her parasol her chauffeur, a mulatto in a white dust-coat.

"Stop here, Joe. I'll walk the rest of the way."

The car drew up along the sidewalk, and Joe opened the door. His eyes, more darkly lustrous than the patent leather of his cap-peak, rolled this side and that like the eyes of a mechanical doll.

Anne hesitated for a moment; could she count on finding a taxi later on, in these drowsy streets? How silly of Antoine not to have taken her advice and moved, after his father's death, to the neighbourhood of the Bois! With the dog under her arm she sprang lithely out of the car. The desire to be free had prevailed.

"I shan't need you again this afternoon, Joe. Go home now."

Even in the shade the sidewalk was hot underfoot, and not a breath of wind stirred. Above the roofs the sky was bathed in silvery haze. Her eyes wincing at the glare, Anne walked past blind house-fronts, carriage-gateways grim as the portals of a jail. Laddie trotted lazily at her heels. Not a soul was out of doors, not even one of those spindle-shanked little girls with pigtails down their backs who sometimes on a Sunday were to be seen playing in the street outside their cell-like homes and inspired Anne with sudden fancies to adopt them for three weeks, take them to Deauville, and regale them with buns and brisk sea-air. No one was about. Like watchdogs moping in their kennels, even the concierges had put off till nightfall the ritual moment for taking the air on their doorsteps, sitting astride their chairs. On that Sunday, the nineteenth of July, the Parisians, worn out by the democratic rejoicings centring on the glorious Fourteenth, seemed to have migrated from the capital *en masse*.

With its roof still ringed by scaffolding, the Thibault building was conspicuous in the street. Striped with veins of fresh cement along its crannies, the old facade now wanted only a coat of paint to renew its youth. The ground floor was hidden by hoardings, plastered with many-coloured posters, that encroached upon the sidewalk.

Holding up the flounces of her wide silk skirt and wrapping it tightly round her, Anne, followed by the little dog, picked her way between the mounds of rubble, sacks of cement, and planks that littered the entrance. There was a cellarlike atmosphere in the vestibule, and the dampness emanating from the wet plaster made her shiver as if an icy sponge had touched her spine. Lifting his small black muzzle, Laddie stopped to nose these most unusual smells. Smiling, Anne stooped and picked up the tiny mass of warm, silken softness and held it to her breast.

Once the glazed hall-door was open, it seemed as if the interior decoration had been completed. A strip of red carpet, which at Anne's last visit had not yet been laid, led from the door to the elevator.

She stopped on the second landing and, by force of habit—though she knew Antoine was away—dabbed her face with powder before ringing.

The door opened diffidently; Léon did not relish being seen as he was then, unceremoniously garbed in a striped waistcoat. The long, glabrous face, crowned by a fluffy growth of yellow down like a fledgeling's, with the arched eyebrows, drooping nose, and plump lower lip, had now that noncommittal air, at once obtuse and cunning, which was a defensive reflex with him. He cast at Anne's mauve frock and flowered hat a sidelong, rapid glance that seemed to take in everything in one wide swoop of comprehension. Then he stood aside to let her enter.

"The doctor is out, Madame."

"I know," she said, putting down her dog.

"I think he is downstairs, Madame, with some gentlemen."

Anne bit her lip. When Antoine had accompanied her to the station on the previous Tuesday—she was returning to Berck—he had told her he was going to the country on Sunday afternoon, for a consultation. During the six months their liaison had lasted, she had on more than one occasion caught Antoine misinforming her as to such small details of his life; it was his way of safeguarding his independence.

"Don't bother," she said, handing Léon her parasol. "I've only come to write a note for you to give to the doctor."

Walking past the servant, she stepped onto the deep-piled brown moquette which now carpeted the entire flat once occupied by M. Thibault. The Pekinese went straight to the door of Antoine's study and stopped outside it. Anne opened it, let the dog in, and entered the room, closing the door behind her.

The windows were shut and the blinds down. The room was redolent of varnish and new upholstery, with another, older smell of paint lingering in the background. She walked quickly to the desk and, resting her hands on the back of the desk chair, took stock of her surroundings. Her eyes were hard with suspicion and her nostrils dilated as if she were scenting out the secrets of the room. She was looking for a clue that might throw some light on the life that Antoine led apart from her, of which she knew so little.

But nothing could have been less revealing than the bleak luxury of this room. Antoine never worked in it, and used it only on consulting-days. Glazed bookcases curtained with Chinese silk that somehow gave the impression of concealing empty shelves ran half-way up the walls. An impressive writing-desk lorded it in the middle of the room; it was covered with a sheet of plain plateglass, on whose inhospitable surface was strewn a desk set in morocco leather—notepaper-cabinet, writing-pad, and blotter, all with a monogram inset. Not a single letter, document, or even book—except the telephone directory. A vulcanite stethoscope, posted like an ornament beside the crystal inkstand, inkless as yet, was the sole reminder of the profession of the room's owner. And even this appliance did not seem to have been put there by Antoine with medical intent, but by some interior decorator with an eye for picturesque effects.

Laddie had settled down on his belly near the door, with his tiny legs spread out, and his flaxen ringlets merged with the pattern of the carpet. Anne glanced at him absent-mindedly, then perched herself astride an arm of the swivel-chair from which three afternoons a week Antoine dispensed his oracles. For a moment she toyed with the fancy that she was he, and felt a subtle pleasure in it; it was a revenge for the too scanty place he had given her in his life.

From the writing-case she took the block of headed notepaper which Antoine used for prescriptions, and began writing with the fountain-pen she carried in her bag.

> Tony darling, five days without seeing you—that's my limit. So this morning I took the early train. It's four now. I'm going to our place to wait till your day's work is over. Come to me there, Tony dear, as soon as you possibly can.
>
> A.
>
> P.S.—I'll bring the makings of a little dinner, so we shan't have to go out.

Putting the note in an envelope, she rang the bell.

Léon entered. He had put on his livery. He patted the little dog, then went up to Anne.

Perched on the chair-arm, swinging her leg, she was licking the gummed flap of the envelope. She had a well-formed mouth, a thick, but nimble tongue. The scent with which she drenched her clothes hovered in the room. Catching a curious gleam in the manservant's eye, she smiled to herself.

"There you are!" She flung the letter onto the desk with a quick gesture that set her bracelets tinkling. "Will you be very nice and give him this the moment he comes in?"

She usually addressed him in this familiar tone when Antoine was not there, and so naturally that Léon took it quite for granted. There were so many secret, unavowed complicities between them. When she called for Antoine before going out to dinner and had to wait, she always chatted amiably with Léon; indeed his company was to her like a breath of congenial air from younger days. Moreover, he never took advantage of her affability; the furthest he went on such occasions was sometimes to omit a deferential "Madame." When she gave him a tip, he was gratified for being able to express his thanks by a mere flutter of the eyelids, his heart immune from the least nuance of class hatred.

Stretching out a leg, she slipped her hand under her skirt to pull up a silk stocking, then jumped down from the chair.

"I'm off, Léon. Where did you put my parasol?"

The best chance of finding a taxi was to walk up the Rue des Saints-Peres to the boulevard. The street was almost empty. A young man passed her, coming from the opposite direction; they glanced at each other casually, neither suspecting that they had met before on a certain rather memorable day. They could hardly have been expected to recognize each other. In four years Jacques had greatly changed; the thickset young man with the careworn face had neither the look nor the gait of the boy who had once gone to Touraine to attend Simon de Battaincourt's wedding. And though in the course of that curious ceremony Jacques had gazed with interest at the bride, he would have been hard put to it to recognize, under the make-up and in the shadow of the parasol, the features of the "sinister" widow his friend Simon had married.

"Avenue de Wagram," Anne said to the driver.

"Avenue de Wagram" meant for her "our place"—a ground-floor bachelor flat that Antoine had rented at the beginning of their intimacy. The flat had a private entrance in a side-street, enabling them to elude the concierge's watchful eye.

Antoine had always refused to come to Anne's house in the Rue Spontini, near the Bois, though for some months she had been living there in solitary freedom. When, on Antoine's advice, Huguette had been put in a plaster cast and sent to a sanatorium at Berck-sur-Mer, Anne had taken a house near by, and it had been settled she would stay there with her husband till the little girl recovered. A heroic resolution, by which Anne had not been able to abide for long. It was Simon—he had never cared for Paris—who had settled at the seaside permanently with his step-daughter and her English governess. His great hobby was photography, but he did a little sketching and music-making as well; and he would sit up late at night reading books on Protestantism—an aftermath of his theological studies.

Anne meanwhile snatched at every pretext for being in Paris, and limited her stays at Berck to five or six days each month. The maternal instinct had never been strong in her, and in the past she had regarded the constant presence of her fourteen-year-old daughter as a handicap, not to say an infliction. And now to this rankling animosity there was added a sense of humiliation whenever she saw Miss Mary wheeling the child in her bath-chair along the sand-tracks between the dunes. Anne might sometimes dream of taking anaemic little girls off the streets and adopting them, but she found it quite natural to neglect her own daughter. At Paris, anyhow, she could put Huguette, and Simon, out of mind.

The car had entered the Avenue de Wagram when Anne remembered about the "little dinner." The shops here were closed, but she knew of a grocery near the Place des Ternes that stayed open on Sundays. She had the driver take her there, and then dismissed the taxi.

She took a childish delight in shopping. With the Pekinese under her arm, she strolled from one appetizing counter to another, choosing first the things that Antoine liked—brown bread, salt butter, smoked breast of goose, a basket of strawberries. For Laddie's benefit as much as Antoine's, she added a jar of cream.

"Give me a slice of that, please!" she added, greedily pointing a gloved finger toward a terrine of humble *pâté de joie de porc*. "That" was a titbit for herself; she had a weakness for pig's liver *pâté*, but nowadays—except when she was travelling, at a station buffet or a country inn—she had few chances of gratifying so plebeian a taste. Nibbling a slice of fresh bread spread with a slice of the pink, greasy *pâté*, ringed with lard and richly spiced with cloves and nutmeg, she felt on her lips the savour of the days when she was a young Paris shopgirl, of the cold lunches she used to eat, all alone on a bench in the Tuileries Gardenss among the pigeons and sparrows. Nothing to drink—but a bag of cherries bought in the street had quenched the thirst raised by the spices. And, to round off the meal, when it was time to hurry back to the shop, there had been a little cup of sweet, piping-hot coffee, drunk standing at the bar of a Café in the Rue Saint-Roch.

Lost in memories, she watched the shopkeeper tying up the parcels, making out the bill.

"All alone… ." For even in those days she had had an intuition that her best chance of succeeding in life was to keep secret and aloof—without friends, ties, or fixed habits—always available for a sudden change of fortune. Ah, if the old woman who in those days used to prowl about the Tuileries Gardens with a basket on her arm, sounding her clapper, selling sugar-wafers and soft drinks, and telling fortunes on the side, could have predicted that one day the little shopgirl would be *Mme.* Goupillot, wife of the chain-store magnate! Still, thus it had come about, and today, seen in perspective, it all seemed quite natural.

"Your parcel, Madame."

Anne was conscious of the shopkeeper's eyes lingering on her figure. She was getting more and more to enjoy the glancing impact of men's desire. This one was scarcely more than a boy, with an ill-shaped but healthy-looking mouth, chapped lips, and a light down on his cheeks. She slipped a finger under the string, and as she drew herself erect, bending her head a little back, her grey eyes bestowed upon the youngster a coquettish glance in guise of thanks.

The parcel was by no means heavy. She had plenty of time; it was only five. She put the dog down and started back on foot.

"Come on, Laddie! A walk'll do us good."

She moved with long, lithe, swinging steps, and there was a hint of arrogance in her bearing. For never could she recall her past without a thrill of pride. She was conscious that her success in life was wholly her own handiwork, due to her indomitable will.

Looking back on her career impartially, as if it were another's, she was full of wondering admiration for the persistence she had shown from her earliest days in clambering up from the depths—like a drowning man with every fibre of his being set to lift him to the surface. And it had been so as to rise the better that she had, in the slow course of her chaste girlhood, kept herself so jealously aloof from men. She had lived with her father, a widower, and a brother older than herself. On Sundays while her father, a plumber's helper, was playing bowls with his cronies, she used to go for walks with her brother and his friends, in the Bois de Vincennes. One evening on the way back, a young electrician, one of her brother's set, had tried to kiss her. She had turned seventeen and rather liked the young man. But she had slapped him and run straight home by herself. After that she had refused to go out again with her brother, and stayed at home on Sundays, sewing.

She had always been fond of everything concerned with dress. A woman who had been friendly with her mother and kept a small dry-goods shop, had taken her to serve at the counter. But life had been depressing in the small suburban shop, patronized only by the poorest class.

Then one day she had had the luck of getting a post as salesgirl at a branch of the Goupillot stores which had just opened in Vincennes. For two years she had spent her days furling and unfurling lengths of taffeta and velvet, in close, almost physical contact with the daylong crowd of shoppers, and countering the amorous advances of clerks and department managers with friendly, noncommittal smiles. Each evening, a model of decorum, she went straight home and cooked the family dinner. On the whole she had pleasant memories of that phase of her life.

On her father's death she had left the suburbs for a much-sought-after post at the principal establishment, in the heart of Paris, at which old Goupillot himself, the owner of the business, sometimes put in an appearance. Then she had had to play her cards well, to bring him to the marrying point. "Play your cards well" might have been her motto in life. Even now …! Was it not she who, at her first meeting with Antoine, had set her heart on captivating him, had gradually broken down his resistance and—won the game? He had never suspected it, for she had been adroit enough to humour his masculine vanity and make him fancy he had taken the initiative. And she was too old a hand at the game to prefer the vain delights of flaunting her power, to the more truly glorious satisfaction of wielding it in secret and plying all the weapons of apparent weakness.

Her musings had brought her to the little flat. The walk had made her warm, and the cool silence of the rooms, which had been closed all day, came as a delight to her. Standing in the middle of the bedroom she quickly let fall all the garments she was wearing and, running to the bathroom, turned on both taps.

She had a thrill of pleasure in the glimpse of her slim nakedness in the mirrors; a soft white radiance, like the sheen of a dead planet, filtering through the frosted panes, enhanced the lustre of her skin. Leaning above the hissing jets of water, absently she stroked the dusky hips that still were lithe as ever, the breasts that had lost something of their firmness. When the bath was half full, she put an exploring foot over the edge. The water was no more than tepid; with a little sensual shiver she let her body sink into it.

A white, blue-striped bath-towel hanging on the wall in front of her brought a smile to her lips; at a "little dinner" they had had together the other day, Antoine had comically draped himself in it. And suddenly she remembered the mild "scene" they had had that evening. When she had put a question to Antoine regarding his liaison with Rachel he had answered with a slightly acid look: "That's the difference: *I* tell you everything, *I* don't make a mystery of my past."

It was true that she talked very little about herself. At the beginning of their intimacy Antoine had commented one evening, as he bent above her face, on her "Mona Lisa eyes." Nothing had ever delighted her more, and she had treasured the remark. Since then she had made a point of veiling her past life in mystery, to maintain the glamour. She wondered now if that had not been a mistake. Perhaps Antoine would have liked discovering behind the enigmatic "woman with a past" the young shopgirl of Goupillot's stores. She decided to think it over. Her earlier life had been varied enough, and she would not have to draw on her imagination to present another picture of herself: the sentimental little *midinette* she had been at a certain period of her youth.

Always her senses tingled when she thought of Antoine. She loved him for everything he was, for the self-confidence and energy of which, perhaps, he was too consciously aware. She adored him for his ardour as a lover, inclined though he was to be a little too unsentimental, not to say callous, in his dealings with her. And in an hour or so he would be with her… .

Stretching her limbs, she let her head sink back, and closed her eyes. Her tiredness seemed melting delightfully away into the water. A sense of physical well-being permeated her. Above her all was silent; not a soul was stirring in the whole building. The only sounds were the quick breathing of the little dog, sprawling on the cool tiles, a faint clatter of roller-skates in a neighbouring courtyard, and the measured cadence of water falling drop by drop from the cold-water tap.

# Chapter XIV

STANDING at the corner of the Rue de l'Université, Jacques gazed at the house where he had been born. A maze of scaffolding made it unrecognizable. "Of course," he murmured to himself. "Antoine had planned all sorts of alterations."

He had made two trips to Paris since his father's death, but without revisiting the quarter where he had lived or even letting his brother know of his coming. Antoine had written him several affectionate letters in the course of the winter. Jacques had limited his replies to brief, if cordial, postcards. He had not even made an exception in his reply to a long business letter dealing with the estate left by his father. In five lines he had categorically refused to take his share of the inheritance, giving hardly any reasons for his refusal and asking his brother never again to refer to "such matters."

He had been in France since the previous Tuesday. On the day following the meeting with Boehm, Meynestrel had said to him: "Go to Paris. I may need your help there during the next few days. For the moment I can't say anything definite. Take the opportunity of finding out how the land lies, and just what's happening at that end. I'd like to know the reactions of the French left wing, especially Jaurés's group and the *Humanité* crowd. If you don't hear from me on Sunday or Monday, you can come back. Unless you think you can be of use at Paris."

Till now he had not found time to look up Antoine; or, perhaps, had shirked it. But events just now were taking such an ominous turn that he had decided not to leave without paying a visit to his brother.

Gazing up at the second floor, resplendent with new sunblinds, he tried to locate *his* window, the window of the room which had been his as a little boy. … It struck him there was still time to retreat, and he hesitated for a moment; then, making up his mind, he crossed the road and entered the portico.

Everything had changed out of recognition. The dark wallpaper patterned with fleurs-de-lis, the carved wooden banisters and medieval stained-glass windows of the staircase as he had known it in the past had given place to distempered walls, wrought ironwork, and large plateglass windows. Only the elevator remained as it was. There was exactly the same sharp click, the same metallic clang, the same oily rumble that had always accompanied its upward start—sounds which Jacques could never hear without an inward pang of distress, without living again through one of the most hateful episodes of his thwarted youth: his homecoming after the flight to Marseille. It was at the moment when Antoine led him to this elevator, shepherded him into this prisonlike cage, that the fugitive had understood that he was hopelessly trapped, defenceless. His father, the Reformatory. Now Geneva and the International. Tomorrow, perhaps, war… .

"Hello, Léon! What a lot of changes! Is my brother at home?"

Léon gaped with amazement at this visitor from another world. At last he spoke, in a slightly flustered tone. "The doctor? No. Well—er—yes; I'm sure he's at home for *you*, sir. He's downstairs now, in the office. You'll have to go one flight down, sir. The door is open, you've only to walk in."

On the landing Jacques saw a brass plate on the door:

DR. A. OSCAR-THIBAULT
*Laboratory*

"So he's taken over the whole house," Jacques thought, "and tacked on the 'Oscar,' too, as Father wanted."

The door opened from outside. Turning the silver-plated handle, Jacques stepped into a hall flanked by three exactly similar doors. He heard voices behind one of them. Could Antoine be receiving patients, on a Sunday? Jacques moved doubtfully toward the door.

"Biometric observations … research work in educational establishments …"

The speaker was not Antoine. Then, suddenly, Jacques recognized his brother's voice.

"The first thing is to collect test-cases. Then to classify the data. In a few months' time any neurologist, or specialist in child pathology, or indeed educator, should be able to find here, in our records …"

Yes, that was Antoine, sure enough. No mistaking his astringent, rather complacent tones, with the faintly mocking lift at the close of each phrase. "Later on," Jacques said to himself, "he'll have exactly his father's voice."

Ceasing to listen, he stayed there for a moment, with his eyes fixed on the new linoleum floor covering. Again he felt a vague impulse to go away. But Léon had seen him, and anyhow, as he had come all this way, he had better go through with it. He threw back his shoulders and, with the assurance of a grownup who feels no qualms about breaking in on a children's party, went up to the door and rapped on it briskly.

Vexed by the interruption, Antoine rose and, frowning, held the door ajar. "What the devil? … Oh! It's you, Jacques!" A glow of happiness lit up his face.

Jacques, too, was smiling, yielding to a rush of the fraternal affection which, all things notwithstanding, swept him off his feet each time he met Antoine again, Antoine in flesh and blood, with his determined look, square-cut forehead, stubborn mouth… .

"Come in, old man." Antoine was gazing intently at his brother, at the dark sunburnt forelock, those ever-changing eyes, and the vague smile that brought back to his mind Jacques as a small boy. Yes, it was indeed his dear young brother standing there!

Three men with perspiring face, collarless, in unbuttoned white coats, were seated at a big table on which tumblers, lemons, and an ice-pail jostled sheets of paper and outspread graphs.

"This is my brother," Antoine announced, beaming with delight.

The three men rose from their seats, and Antoine made the introductions. "Isaac Studler, Rene Jousselin, Manuel Roy."

"Sure I'm not disturbing you?" Jacques asked uncomfortably.

"You are!" Antoine gave his colleagues a cheerful grin. "Isn't that so? There's no two ways about it, he *is* disturbing us, confound him! But—so much the better. It's a case of *force majeure*. Sit down, Jacques."

Without replying, Jacques glanced round the enormous room, all the walls of which were taken up by shelves, filled with rows of brand-new numbered filing-cases.

Antoine was amused by his brother's look of surprise. "I expect you're wondering where you are. You're in our record room, that's all. How about a cool drink? A whisky and soda? No? Roy must fix you up a lemonade, then," he decreed, turning to the youngest of the three men. Roy was a typical Parisian student, with an intelligent face and bright, attentive eyes, the eyes of a good pupil.

While Roy was squeezing a lemon over a tumbler half filled with crushed ice, Antoine turned to Studler. "We'll go into all that again next Sunday, old boy."

Studler was noticeably older than the others; indeed he seemed even Antoine's senior. His name Isaac might have been given to match his profile, a beard that hailed from the *Arabian Nights*, the rapt eyes of an oriental seer. Jacques fancied he had met the man already, in the days when he was living with his brother.

"Jousselin, please put these papers back into the files," Antoine continued. "In any case, we shan't be able to make a serious start while I'm busy at the hospital, and my vacation doesn't begin till August i."

Jacques listened. August … vacation! Something of his surprise may have shown on his face, for Antoine, who was looking at him, made haste to explain. "Oh, we've agreed, all four of us, not to take any vacation this year—under the circumstances."

"I quite understand." Jacques's tone and look were grave.

"Why, it's less than three weeks since the builders finished work on the house, and none of our new departments is in running order yet. In any case, what with my hospital work and private practice, I couldn't have found time before then to get things going. But with two quiet months before us we'll do it easily."

Jacques gazed at him in amazement. The man who could speak thus had obviously noticed nothing in the present tension of the world that might disturb the smooth course of his work or shake his confidence in the near future.

"That surprises you, eh?" Antoine continued. "But of course you've no idea of our plans. We're out to do something—something big, aren't we, Studler? I'll tell you all about it. You'll dine with me, of course? Now drink your lemonade, then I'll show you round my new domain. I'd like you to get an idea of our arrangements. Then we'll go upstairs and have a chat."

Jacques was thinking: "He hasn't changed a bit. He's always got to be organizing, taking the lead." Obediently he finished his lemonade and rose. Antoine was already standing up.

"We'll go down to the laboratories first," he said.

Till M. Thibault's death Antoine had led the normal life of a promising young doctor. He had passed his examinations in due order, had had himself placed on the Register, and, pending a vacancy in one of the hospitals, had built up a private practice.

Suddenly his father's death had conferred on him unlooked-for power: the power of wealth. Antoine was not a man to miss the golden opportunity.

He had no dependents, no costly vices. Only one passion: work. Only one ambition: to become a leader of men. In his eyes hospital work and private practice were merely a training-ground. What really counted for him was his research work in child pathology. And so no sooner did he realize he was a rich man than his already powerful vitality was vastly multiplied. One thought possessed him: to devote his wealth to speeding up his rise in his profession.

His programme was quickly settled. The first thing was to provide himself with the requisite equipment: laboratories, a library, a staff of competent assistants. With money, everything was feasible. He could even buy the brains and loyal service of young, struggling practitioners and, while assuring them a comfortable livelihood, employ their gifts for the advancement of his researches and their extension into new fields. His thoughts had immediately turned to Studler—the "Caliph" as he was called in the days when they were fellow-students -—a friend of Dr. Héquet. He had always been aware of the Caliph's methodical mind, his intellectual probity and capacity for hard work. Next, his choice had fallen on two young men: Manuel Roy, a medical student who had worked under him for several years at the hospital; and Rene Jousselin, an analytical chemist, whose researches on serums had already brought him to the fore.

Under the guidance of an enterprising architect the whole house had been completely transformed within a few months. The ground floor now communicated with the one above it by an inside staircase; it had been converted into a set of laboratories equipped with the most up-to-date apparatus. No detail had been scamped. Whenever some technical difficulty arose, Antoine's hand went instinctively to the pocket in which he kept his chequebook. "Make out an estimate, please." The cost he brushed aside. He set little store by money, much by the success of his schemes. His lawyer and his banker were shocked to see him squandering with such a will a fortune that had been slowly amassed and prudently administered by two generations of *grands bourgeois*. But Antoine had no qualms; he sold large blocks of shares, laughing at the timid warnings of his business advisers. In any case, he had drawn up his financial programme, too. He had resolved to invest what capital remained to him after these inroads, in foreign government stock and especially in Russian mines, on the advice of his friend Rumelles, the diplomat. He reckoned thus to enjoy an income which, according to his calculations, would be approximately the same as that which M. Thibault, faithful to safe investments with small yields, had been receiving on the family capital when it was still intact.

The inspection tour of the ground-floor premises lasted nearly half an hour; Antoine spared his brother no detail. He even took him down to the former cellars, which had been converted into one huge basement-room with whitewashed walls. Jousselin had recently set up in it a malodorous stock-farm, with pens of guinea-pigs, rats, and mice, and a frog-tank. Antoine was in ecstasies, laughing every moment with that full-throated laugh of youthful exuberance which after long years of repression had been released, for good, by Rachel. "A rich man's child showing his toys," Jacques thought.

On the first floor were the private studies of Antoine's three colleagues, a small operating-room, and the large room serving as record room and library.

"With that behind us we can get to work," Antoine observed in a tone of grave satisfaction as they were going up to the next floor. "I'm thirty-three. High time to settle down to my job in earnest, if I'm to leave something lasting behind me. You know, old man"—he swung round on Jacques with the rather forced abruptness he liked to display, especially to his brother—"one can always do far more than one imagines. When one *wants* something, something realizable, of course—and personally I never aim at things that

aren't realizable—well, when one really sets one's heart on something …" He left the phrase unfinished, smiled complacently, and began walking again.

"How far have you got with your exams?" Jacques asked, for the sake of saying something.

"I passed the hospitals exam last winter. I've still to grind for the fellowship—because one must be qualified as well for a professorial post later on. Still—it's a fine thing, of course, being a good children's doctor, like Philip, but I've come to feel that's not enough for me; it wouldn't give me scope. I believe that it's on the psychological side that medicine today is going to make a great forward step. Well, I want to play a part in that advance, do you see? I don't want to be left out when it happens. It's not a mere accident that while I was working for my last exam I devoted so much attention to the subject of defective speech in children. Child psychology is, I'm convinced, only in its infancy. This is the time to start in. I propose next year to round off my studies of the connexion between breathing exercises for youngsters and their mental development." He swung round. On his face had suddenly settled the look of the great savant whose superior knowledge sets him above the ruck of ordinary mortals. Before putting his key to the lock, he gave his brother a searching look. "What a lot remains to be done in that field!" he slowly said. "What tangles to straighten out!"

Jacques said nothing. Rarely had Antoine's way of seeming, as it were, to grit his teeth on life got on his nerves so violently. Confronted with this levelheaded young man in the thirties who seemed so sure of having launched out on a flowing tide, he realized with something akin to horror his own lack of balance—and, even more keenly, the menace of the storm brooding over Europe.

In his mood of hostility, he found the process of being shown round Antoine's apartment particularly exasperating. Antoine preened himself among its splendours like a cock lording it in his barnyard. He had done away with most of the walls between rooms and completely changed the lay-out of the apartment. Though somewhat over-elaborate, the general effect was a success. Tall lacquer screens partitioned off the two waiting-rooms into small boxlike recesses, ensuring privacy for the patients waiting their turn. Antoine seemed to take pride in this innovation—which made the rooms seem like an exhibition of decorative art. He told Jacques that personally he attached little importance to such displays of opulence. "But," he explained, "it helps to sort out my clientele—do you see? With fewer patients, I have more time for my work."

The dressing-room was a marvel of ingenuity and comfort. As he took off his white coat, Antoine amused himself by swinging to and fro the gleaming doors of the wardrobe.

"Everything's within arm's reach. That saves time, you see."

He put on a smoking-jacket. Jacques observed that his brother was dressing now with much more elegance than in the past. Nothing was showy, but the white shirt was of the finest linen, and the black coat of silk. This quiet spruceness suited him very well, and he seemed to have grown younger, lither, without having lost anything of his robustness.

"How at home he seems in all this luxury!" Jacques thought. "He has Father's vanity, the aristocratic vanity of the bourgeois. What a class! Really, one would think they regard as a proof of their superiority not only their wealth but their habit of 'doing themselves well,' their taste for comfort and the best of everything. They've come to see it as a matter of personal merit which gives them certain social rights. They find the esteem they enjoy perfectly justified. Justified, too, their power, and the subservience of others. Yes, they find it quite natural to 'possess the earth'! Equally natural that their possessions should be shielded by the law against the greed of those who have none. Oh, yes, they're generous, all right! Provided their generosity is only another luxury, a harmless extravagance." And Jacques recalled the precarious existences of his friends in Switzerland. No extravagances for them—though, to help the others, each was always ready to sacrifice his all.

Yet, as he gazed down at the bath, big as a miniature swimming-pool and shimmering with light, he could not repress a prick of envy. His bedroom at three francs a night was decidedly uncomfortable, A bath would be delightful in this heat!

"Here's my study." Antoine opened the door.

Entering, Jacques went up to a window.

"Why, surely this used to be the drawing-room?"

Here for thirty-five consecutive years M. Thibault had been wont to hold the family conclaves, in a dim, religious light between the brocaded window curtains and the heavily draped doors. The architect had achieved an ingenious transformation; it was now a bright, bare, modern room, dignified without being bleak, bathed in the light that flooded in through three large windows divested of their former Gothic panes.

Antoine made no reply. He had been surprised to see the letter from Anne, whom he believed to be at Berck, lying on the desk. Opening it at once, he glanced through the contents and his brows knitted. A picture had risen before him of Anne in the familiar setting of their little flat, Anne in the white silk peignoir half revealing her slim nakedness. Glancing instinctively at the clock, he thrust the note into his pocket… . Why should she want him just on an evening which, for once, he had a chance of spending with his brother?

"What?" he asked. He had missed Jacques's remark. "I never work here. It's my consulting-room. I stay mostly in my old room. Come along."

Léon approached them from the end of the passage.

"Did you find the letter, sir?"

"Yes. Bring some drinks, please. In the study."

The study was one of the rare parts of the flat to seem inhabited. As a matter of fact, it gave an impression not so much of work as of confused, multifarious activity. Still, its disorder rather appealed to Jacques. The writing-table was strewn with memorandum slips, notebooks, press-clippings, and miscellaneous papers; hardly any space was left for writing. The shelves were full of well-worn books, periodicals with markers between the pages, bundles of photographs, medicine bottles, and pharmaceutical samples.

"Well, let's sit down a bit." Antoine drew Jacques toward a capacious easy-chair and stretched himself full length among the cushions on the sofa. He always liked to talk lying down. "Lying or standing," he would say. "I leave the sitting position to bureaucrats." He saw Jacques's eyes rove round the room, pausing on the Buddha on the mantelpiece.

"Fine, isn't it? It's an eleventh-century piece, from the Ramsay collection."

His eyes lingered on his brother affectionately, then suddenly grew questioning.

"Let's hear your news, for a change. Have a cigarette? What brings you to France? The Caillaux case, I'll wager—you've been asked to write it up, eh?"

Jacques did not reply. His eyes were fixed on the Buddha's face, which, against the background of a golden lotus curved like a sea-shell, seemed aglow with radiant serenity. His earnest gaze shifted to his brother. In his eyes there was a hint of terror and his expression was so sombre that Antoine felt uneasy; some new tragedy, he supposed, was darkening his young brother's life.

Léon came in with a tray, which he set down beside the sofa.

"You haven't told me yet," Antoine said. "How is it you're in Paris? Staying long? What will you have to drink? Personally, I'm still addicted to cold tea."

Jacques declined, with a fretful gesture. "Look here, Antoine," he said in a low voice, "is it possible that over here you haven't any notion of what's threatening?"

Bending over the edge of the sofa, Antoine was holding between his hands the tumbler he had just filled. Before bringing it to his lips he was savouring the fragrance of the tea, discreetly flavoured with rum and lemon. Jacques could see only the crown of his head, the far-away, preoccupied expression of his eyes. Antoine was thinking of Anne, who must be expecting him now; he would have to call her up before long.

Jacques felt inclined to get up and go away without further explanation.

"And what's threatening?" Antoine murmured, without changing his position. At last, almost reluctantly it seemed, he turned toward his brother.

For a moment they gazed at each other silently. Then, "A war," Jacques said hoarsely.

The telephone-bell sounded in the hall.

"Yes?" The smoke rising from his cigarette made Antoine blink a little. "Those damned Balkan states at it again?"

He glanced through a newspaper every morning and was vaguely aware that one of those incomprehensible "diplomatic crises" which periodically fluttered the political dovecotes of Central Europe was in progress.

"What we ought to do," he said with a smile, "is to put a ring-fence round those damned Balkan states and let them go on cutting each other's throats till they're exterminated."

Léon's face appeared at the door.

"You're wanted on the phone, sir," he announced in a mysterious tone.

"That's Anne," Antoine said to himself. And though there was a telephone in the room, just beside him, he rose and went to the consulting-room.

For a while Jacques stared at the door by which his brother had gone out. Then suddenly, as though announcing an irrevocable verdict, he said aloud: "The gulf between Antoine and myself is… unbridgeable." (There were moments when he felt a rageful satisfaction in declaring that the gulf was "unbridgeable.")

In the consulting-room Antoine snatched up the receiver.

"Hello! Is that you?" asked a warm, rich contralto voice, its natural vibrancy amplified still further by the telephone.

Antoine smiled across the void. "Bad news, darling. I was just going to call you. I'm dreadfully sorry, but Jacques has just rolled in. My brother Jacques. He's come from Geneva. Yes, quite unexpectedly. A moment ago. So you see … Where are you calling from?"

The voice, coaxingly: "Why, from *our* place, Tony dear. I'm waiting for you here."

"Please forgive me, darling. I can't leave Jacques just now. You understand, don't you?"

No reply.

He called her name.

Still no reply.

"Anne dear!"

Standing beside the huge, pretentious desk, with his head bent over the receiver, Antoine sent a vague, uneasy gaze roaming across the brown carpet, the chair-legs, the lower shelves of the bookcases.

"Yes," the voice whispered back at last. And after a pause: "Will he—will he be staying very late?"

So heart-broken was the tone that Antoine felt deeply moved. "I don't suppose so," he replied. "Why?"

"Oh, Tony, surely you don't think I could bring myself to start back tonight without having had even a teeny-weeny glimpse of you? If you only could see the state I'm in! Everything's ready for you, dear—including our little dinner… ."

He laughed, and she, too, forced a laugh.

"Try to picture how it looks at this end. The little table in front of the window. The big green salad-bowl full of wild strawberries." After a moment she began speaking again, quickly, hoarsely. "Tony dear, do you really mean it? Can't you possibly come here right away—just for an hour or so?"

"No, darling. I can't possibly get away before eleven, or midnight. Do be reasonable!"

"Not even for a minute?"

"You don't understand… ."

"Yes, I do understand," she broke in sadly. "There's nothing to be done about it. What a shame!" She paused, then gave a little cough. "All right, it can't be helped. I'll wait for you." The faint sigh of resignation told Antoine what it had cost her to accept her disappointment.

"I'll be with you later, darling."

"Yes… . Wait!"

"What is it?"

"No, it's nothing."

"At eleven, then."

"Yes, Tony dear."

Antoine held the receiver to his ear for a moment. Anne, too, at the other end, could not bring herself to put down the receiver. After a hasty glance round the room, Antoine brought his lips close to the mouthpiece and made the sound of a kiss. Then, smiling, he rang off.

# Chapter XV

WHEN Antoine came back to the room, Jacques, who had not stirred from his armchair, was struck by the radiant expression of his brother's face. It conveyed an intimate emotion which he somehow fancied was of an amorous nature. Decidedly, he thought, Antoine had greatly changed.

"Sorry, old man. With that confounded telephone one never has a moment's peace."

Antoine walked to the small table on which he had left his glass, took a few sips, then went back to the couch and stretched himself full length on it.

"What was it we were talking about? Oh, yes, you were saying something about a war… ."

He had never found time to take an interest in politics or wished to do so. His scientific training had got him into the way of thinking that in the social, just as in the organic, world everything is a problem and a hard one; that in every field the seeker after truth needs to apply himself to his subject and become something of an expert. And politics, as he saw it, was a specialized activity widely removed from his own. To his reasoned aloofness was added a natural repugnance for politics. From its first page to its last the history of nations was, to his mind, a chronicle of scandalous events, and he had come to regard the very exercise of power as tainted with a certain lack of scruple. In any case, it seemed to him that that unflinching honesty which he, as a physician, held to be all-essential was not the rule, and perhaps not so necessary in the field of politics. Consequently he watched the trend of public affairs with a mistrustfully indifferent eye, as dispassionately as he watched the activities of the Postal Service or those of the Public Works Department. And if, in a smoking-room chat—at the house of his friend Rumelles, for instance—he happened in a casual way to venture an opinion on the doings of some minister in power, it was always from a definite, matter-of-fact, deliberately unsophisticated viewpoint, after the fashion of a passenger in a bus who, wishing to praise or to criticize the driver, takes notice only of the way he handles the wheel.

Now, however, as Jacques seemed to be so keen on it, he was quite willing to begin the conversation with an exchange of generalities on European politics. And it was with the best of intentions that, hoping to end Jacques's silence, he went on to ask: "So you really think another war is brewing in the Balkans?"

Jacques stared intently at his brother. "Do you mean to say that here in Paris you haven't any inkling of what's been happening in the last three weeks? Of all the signs and portents that are piling up? It isn't merely a local Balkan war that's on the way; it's the whole of Europe that's heading straight for war this time. So you people are just carrying on as usual, without a thought for the near future?"

Antoine clicked his lips sceptically.

But what was it that suddenly brought to his mind the gendarme who had called, early one morning, last winter, just as he was leaving for the hospital, to alter the mobilization orders in his service book? It occurred to him that he hadn't even troubled to find out what his new duties were to be. After the gendarme left, he had tossed the book into a drawer and forgotten all about it… .

"You don't seem to understand, Antoine. We've come to a pass when if everyone acts as you do, if everyone lets things drift, there'll be no chance of staving off disaster. Even as it is, any little thing, a single shot fired by some hothead on the Austro-Servian frontier, would start a war off."

Antoine made no comment. He had received a slight shock. A quick flush rose to his cheeks. The words just spoken had suddenly jarred, as it were, some secret spot within him, which so far had not made its presence felt by any special sensitivity. He, like so many others in that summer of 1914, had experienced a vague feeling of being at the mercy of some collective hysteria—of a world-wide character, perhaps—brooding in the air. And for a few seconds he was worried by a premonition he was powerless to shake off. Very soon, however, he got over that absurd feeling of discomfort and, his reaction driving him to the other extreme (as was so often the case), he found a certain pleasure in contradicting his brother, though in a quite amicable tone.

"On that point, of course, I'm not so well informed as you are. Still, you must agree that in so advanced a state of civilization as ours in Western Europe, the mere idea of a general conflict is almost inconceivable. For things to come to that pass there'd have to be, at any rate, a complete reversal of opinion. And that would take time, months and months—years, perhaps—during which other problems would crop up and act as counter-irritants, taking the sting out of our present squabbles."

He gave a genial smile, his equanimity entirely restored by his own arguments.

"These war-scares, you know, are nothing new. I remember one twelve years ago, while I was on military service at Rouen. When it comes to prognosticating a war or a revolution, there's never any lack of prophets of evil. And the queerest part of it is that the signs upon which these pessimists base their prophecies are invariably correct and genuinely alarming. Only there you are: for some reason that hasn't been taken sufficiently into account or has been underestimated, events don't pan out as expected, and things somehow right themselves. And life goes on for better or for worse. And peace likewise."

Crouching forward, his forelock straggling across his forehead, Jacques heard him out impatiently.

"This time, let me tell you, Antoine, it's extremely serious."

"What is? That rumpus between Austria and Servia?"

"That's only a pretext, the 'incident' they've been waiting for—deliberately engineered, quite likely. But don't forget the agitation that's been going on for years and years behind the scenes in the overarmed countries of Europe. That capitalist society you seem to think so safely moored in peaceful waters is adrift, the prey of all sorts of secret, furious antagonisms."

"Hasn't that always been the case?"

"No! Or rather, yes, perhaps. But——"

"I know, of course," Antoine broke in, "that there's that cursed Prussian militarism driving every country in Europe to arm to the teeth."

"Not Prussian militarism only!" Jacques exclaimed. "Every nation has its own brand of militarism, which it justifies by the interests at stake."

Antoine shook his head. “Interests at stake, I grant you,” he said. “But however acute it may be, competition between those interests might quite easily go on for ages without leading to a war! I’m a believer in peace, and yet to my mind conflict is an essential factor of life. Fortunately we have other forms of conflict available for the nations than a recourse to arms. That sort of thing may be all right in the Balkans, but every government—I am thinking of the great powers—even in the countries which spend most money on armaments, obviously agrees that war is the worst thing that could happen. I’m only repeating what responsible statesmen themselves declare in their speeches.”

“Oh, of course, when talking to their own people, they’re bound to pay lip-service to peace. But most of them are still convinced that war’s a political necessity, something that’s bound to happen now and again, and which, when it does come, must be turned to the best account, and made as profitable as possible. For it’s always the same old story: the root of the whole evil is *profit!*”

Antoine was deep in thought. Just as he was about to voice a further objection, his brother spoke again.

“You see, Europe is just now under the control of half a dozen of those poisonous ‘eminent patriots,’ who under the noxious influence of their General Staffs are shepherding their several countries straight toward war. That’s what everyone should realize. Some of them, the more cynical-minded, know perfectly well what they’re about; they want war, and they’re preparing for it, like criminals plotting a new exploit, because they’re convinced that, sooner or later, events will play into their hands. This is notably the case with Berchtold, in Austria. With Isvolsky and Sazonov in St. Petersburg. As for the rest of them, I won’t go so far as to say they actually want war; in fact, they’re mostly scared of it. But they’re resigned to war, because they think it’s bound to come. And no more dangerous belief can take root in the mind of a statesman than the belief that war’s inevitable. Those who hold that belief, instead of moving heaven and earth to avert it, can think of one thing only: how best to increase their chances of victory, at all risks and as rapidly as may be. Such, no doubt, is the case with the Kaiser and his ministers. It may be the case with the British government. It is certainly the case with France, under Poincaré.”

Antoine’s shoulders came up sharply.

“You talk of Berchtold and Sazonov. As for them, I’ve nothing to say. But Poincaré! You must have taken leave of your senses! In France, apart from a few worthy lunatics like Dérouledè, is there anyone nowadays who dreams of military glory, or revenge? France, in every fibre, from the highest to the lowest social level, hates the idea of war. And if by some absurd accident we came to be dragged into a European mix-up, one thing at least is perfectly certain: no one could tax France with having done anything to bring it about, or throw upon her shoulders the slightest share in the responsibility.”

Jacques leapt to his feet.

“Is it possible? Is this what you’ve come to? Can you seriously mean -that?”

Antoine bent on his brother the steady, compelling gaze which he bestowed on his patients and which always filled them with unbounded faith in him—as if a steady eye must guarantee a perfect diagnosis.

Jacques looked him up and down disdainfully.

“Really, your gullibility takes one’s breath away! The only remedy would be to take you through the history of the French Republic. Do you consider it can honestly be maintained that French policy for the last forty years has been the policy of a peace-loving nation? That France has any real right to declaim against the misuse of force by others? Is it your opinion that our greed for colonies, and particularly our designs upon Africa, haven’t helped to whet the appetites of others? That we haven’t set them shameful examples of colony-grabbing?”

“Wait a bit!” Antoine said. “I fail to see that our penetration of Morocco was in any way illegal. I can remember the Algeciras Conference. It was under a mandate—neither more nor less—from all the powers that we were entrusted, the Spaniards and ourselves, with the mission of pacifying Morocco.”

“That mandate we extorted by force. What’s more, the powers that gave it to us had the intention of using the precedent for their own ends some day or other—as, by the way, they did. Do you suppose, for instance, that if it hadn’t been for our Moroccan campaign, Italy would ever have dared to pounce upon Tripoli, or Austria upon Bosnia?”

Antoine gave him a sceptical look, but he was not sufficiently acquainted with the facts to dissent.

And now that Jacques was started, there was no holding him.

“And what about our alliances? Was it to prove her peaceful intentions that France entered into a military pact with Russia? Everyone knows that if Tsarist Russia made an alliance with revolutionary France, it was in the hope of getting us, when the time came, to back up her designs against Austria and Germany. Do you suppose a man like Delcassé, a pawn in the hands of the English diplomats, was working for peace when he schemed to encircle Germany? The result was simply to bolster up, to develop, to intensify that Prussian militarism you talked of. The other result was a cut-throat competition throughout Europe in preparing for war, putting up fortifications, building battleships and strategic railways, and all the rest of it. In France, ten billion francs have been voted for war credits in the last four years. In Germany, the equivalent of eight billions. In Russia, six hundred millions, borrowed from France for the purpose of building railways that will enable her one day to move her armies westward against Germany.”

“ ‘One day,’ ” Antoine murmured. “Yes, one day, perhaps. But a very distant day.”

Jacques took no notice of the interruption. “All over the Continent,” he went on, “these competitive armaments are being piled up in frantic haste, and they’re ruining every country, causing the vast sums that ought to be devoted to social welfare to be spent on preparations for war. It’s sheer madness, and bound to end in disaster. And we Frenchmen bear our share of the responsibility. Yes, we make no secret of it! Was it in order to satisfy the world of our good intentions that we sent to the Elysee that Stubborn patriot of a Lorrainer, Poincaré, whom every nationalist trouble-maker at once set up as a symbol of jingoism; whose election promptly started our ‘revenge’-mongers off on a ‘lost provinces’ crusade and roused mercenary hopes across the Channel, where the British shopkeepers would love to see their German competitors laid by the heels, and in Russia whetted the appetite of the imperialists, whose everlasting dream is to annex Constantinople?”

He seemed so carried away by his subject that Antoine could not help laughing. He was quite determined not to let himself be drawn into a discussion, and to keep his temper. He did not want this conversation to be anything but a match of wits, an intellectual parlour-game, with political ideas as the counters.

He pointed ironically to the seat from which his brother had risen. “Sit down, do!”

Jacques shot him a withering glance. Then, thrusting his fists into his pockets, he sank back into the armchair.

"As seen from Geneva," he went on after a moment's silence, "I mean, in the international circles in which I live, details become blurred and one sees the general lines of European policy, as it were, in their true perspective. Well, as seen from there, France's evolution in the direction of war is as clear as daylight. And in that evolution, whatever you may think, Poincaré's election as President marked a decisive stage."

Antoine was still smiling.

"There you go again with your Poincaré!" he exclaimed in a bantering tone. "Of course, all *I* know of him is from hearsay. Among the legal fraternity, who are very hard to please, let me tell you, he is universally looked up to. At the Quai d'Orsay, too. Rumelles, who was on his departmental staff, speaks of him as being a man whose heart is in the right place, a scrupulous, diligent minister, straightforward, a lover of law and order, averse to wildcat policies in any shape or form. It strikes me as simply ridiculous to suppose that such a man-"

"Not so fast, not so fast!" Jacques broke in, and, taking his hand from his pocket, fretfully brushed back the lock that kept on falling across his forehead. He was obviously trying to keep himself under control. He was silent for a few moments, his eyes half closed; then he looked up.

"There's such a lot to say that I hardly know where to begin," he confessed. "As regards Poincaré, one must, of course, distinguish between the man and his policy. All the same, to understand his policy one has to understand the man, the whole of him; never losing sight of the fact that in that logic-chopping fire-eater we also have a light-infantry officer, a man with pluck and brawn, who has always shown a taste for soldiering. 'A lover of law and order,' they say. 'A man whose heart is in the right place.' That much I can well believe. Loyal. Dependable. Dependable as all obstinate people are. They even say he is kind-hearted. Quite likely. He signs most of his letters '*Votre dévoué*' and in his case it is no empty phrase; he really enjoys doing a good turn. He's always ready to fight against injustice, to remedy grievances."

"Come, now! All that's likeable enough, isn't it?" Antoine put in.

"Not so fast!" Jacques repeated impatiently. "I've had occasion to go into the psychology of Poincaré pretty thoroughly for an article in the *Beacon*. Above all he's a proud man, one who never bends, who never gives way. Intelligent, of course, but with an argumentative, logical cleverness, lacking in broadness of outlook, without any real genius. And unbelievably stubborn. Quick-witted, but rather shortsighted; with an exceptional memory, but a memory for details. All this goes to make a perfect lawyer—which, by the way, he has always remained—more skilled in handling words than ideas."

Antoine demurred. "If that's all he ever was, how can you account for his political success?"

"By his capacity for hard work, which is simply marvellous. And also by a gift for finance that's rarely to be found in a member of Parliament."

"By his honesty, as well, no doubt. That's a quality which always surprises people in such circles—and commands respect."

"As to his success," Jacques continued, "one may imagine he was himself surprised at it, and that it gradually fired his ambition. For he has grown ambitious. And there are heaps of signs that he wouldn't mind having to play a major part in making history. Or, rather, that he wouldn't mind being the man who caused France to play a leading part in history and who gave France a new renown, with which his name would be for ever linked. The most alarming feature is his conception of national honour, his quasi-religious cult of patriotism. It's due, of course, to his Lorraine origin, his early years in a land that had just suffered mutilation. He belongs to a land and a generation which for years and years have been looking forward to the day of revenge, to the recovery of the lost provinces."

"That's so," Antoine conceded. "But as for suggesting that he aimed at coming into office so as to start a war …"

"Just a moment," Jacques cut in. "Let me have my say. It stands to reason that two and a half years ago, when he became Prime Minister, or even eighteen months ago, when he was sent to the Elysee, if anyone had come up to him and said: 'You're bent on leading France into a war,' he'd have been furiously indignant. Yet call to mind the circumstances in which he was appointed head of the government, in January 1912. Whom did he succeed? Why, Caillaux. Now Caillaux, you'll remember, had just averted a war with Germany. He'd even paved the way for a lasting Franco-German reconciliation. As a matter of fact, it was just on account of that policy of concessions made for the sake of peace that he was turned out by the nationalists. And if Poincaré was able to step into his shoes it was—I won't say because he actually intended to go to war, but anyhow because he was expected to adopt a 'national' policy with regard to Germany, a policy, that is, in sharp contrast with the overconciliatory attitude of a man like Caillaux. The best proof is that the first thing he did was to dig out that old fellow Delcassé, the man who had promoted the encirclement of Germany, and put him in charge at the Quai d'Orsay. And when he became President of the Republic a year later, whose were the votes that gave him his majority P The votes of such bourgeois capitalists as Joseph de Maistre, who hold that war is a biological necessity, a perfectly natural event, deplorable of course, but none the less inevitable now and again. Such people, I believe, wouldn't stir a finger to start a war of revenge, yet for them it's an inspiring possibility, and they'd jump at the chance if a pretext came their way. We used to see them at pretty close quarters, in the old days, at Father's dinners, those diehards of our reactionary bourgeoisie. Not to mention that all the old French parties of the right have never really had any devotion to the Republic, and there's always the idea at the back of their minds that a successful war would give the victorious government dictatorial powers, enabling them to call a halt to the Socialist drive, and even rid the country of its republican demagogues. They indulge in dreams of a disciplined, militarized France—a triumphant France, armed to the teeth, and backed by a vast colonial empire; a France in whose presence everybody else would cringe. Can't you imagine the appeal that dream has for our 'patriots'?"

"Still, since he came into office," Antoine ventured to remark, "Poincaré has never ceased to proclaim his peaceful intentions."

"What's more," Jacques said, "I'm quite willing to believe he means it—though actually such schemes for peaceful expansion very soon turn into war aims when diplomacy fails to put them through. But we've got to take another factor into account, the consequences of which may be immense. For years past it's been a matter of common knowledge that Poincaré is obsessed by two incorrigible beliefs. First, that a clash between Germany and England is bound to come."

"Well, isn't that what you were saying yourself just now?"

"No. I didn't say 'bound to come.' What I did say was that it seemed probable. Secondly, that ever since that Agadir affair Germany has been bent on attacking France, and steadily preparing to do so. Those are Poincaré's two obsessions, and nothing will get them out of his head. And as he's firmly convinced, moreover, that force and the fear that force inspires are the only means of ensuring peace, the conclusion's obvious. If there's one chance left to France of avoiding an attack by Germany, it's by making herself

more and more to be feared. Therefore she must pile up armaments, must take up an uncompromising, not to say aggressive stand. Once you realize that, everything becomes plain—all Poincaré's activities since 1912, both abroad and at home, are seen to be perfectly consistent."

Leaning back among the cushions, Antoine was tranquilly puffing at his cigarette. He was amazed by his brother's excitement, but he listened to him attentively. Jacques's voice, meanwhile, was gradually calming down, like a brimming stream returning to its bed. On this familiar ground, which gave him a brief sense of superiority over his brother, he felt perfectly at ease.

"But really, I seem to be giving you a history lecture; it's ridiculous," he said, forcing a smile to his lips.

Antoine gave him a friendly glance. "No, no, not a bit of it."

"I said just now, 'both abroad and at home.' Well, let's begin with his foreign policy. It's aggressively defensive, as he intends it to be. Take our relations with Russia, for instance. Germany is worried about the Franco-Russian agreement, is she? Well, let her worry! In the war Poincaré sees coming, Russia's assistance is absolutely necessary to stave off a German invasion. Therefore the thing to be done, regardless of German susceptibilities, is to strengthen the Franco-Russian Alliance and do so openly. But that involves appalling risks, for it involves playing the game of Pan-Slavism, whose warlike designs on Austria and Germany are common knowledge. Little does Poincaré care for that! All things considered, he'd rather run the risk of being drawn into a hazardous adventure than that of any loosening of the ties between France and her one and only ally. Nor was there any lack of persons ready to work hand in glove with him in furtherance of that policy—Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, and Isvolsky, the Tsar's ambassador in Paris. To the embassy in St. Petersburg he appointed his friend Delcassé, who for a long time past had openly held the same views. The instructions given him were to foster Russia's warlike inclinations and tighten the bonds between the two countries, so as to promote a policy of force. No stone has been left unturned. We have some very reliable sources of information in Geneva. As far back as his first journey to St. Petersburg as Prime Minister, two years ago, Poincaré made no attempt to dampen Russia's hopes of conquest. And his present visit, to which coming events may lend a terrible significance, is intended, I think, to enable him to verify on the spot, in consultation with the local leaders, whether all is in readiness and the agreement in shape to take effect the moment the signal's given."

Antoine propped himself on his elbow.

"Look here, old man, that's all guesswork really, isn't it?"

"Not a bit of it. It's all been checked up from other sources. Is Poincaré being fooled by the Russians, or is he in collusion with them? It makes little difference; in point of fact, his Russian policy is enough to make your hair stand on end. Perfectly logical, mind you! The policy of a man with a cast-iron belief that war is threatening his country, and the Russian army will be needed for a counter-attack in Eastern Prussia. One should realize the part a man like Isvolsky is playing in Paris with the permission and approval, if not the active encouragement, of Poincaré. Have you the least notion of the amount of money that's being paid to our press by the Russian secret service funds, to keep the war propaganda here in France up to the mark? Did it ever occur to you that the French government not merely tolerates the use of three million roubles for buying up French public opinion, but actually aids and abets the practice?"

"You don't say so!" Antoine exclaimed in mock horror.

"Just listen to this! Do you know who distributes those Russian subsidies among the leading French newspapers? It's our Finance Minister himself! And that's a fact of which we in Geneva have abundant proof. What's more, Hosmer—he's an Austrian who's very well informed as to European affairs—is constantly affirming that ever since the last Balkan wars the press in Western Europe has come to be almost entirely in the pay of the powers that are out for war. That's why the public in those countries is kept in such ignorance of the abominable rivalries which, in Central Europe and in the Balkans, have for the last two years been bringing war nearer every day—for those who have eyes to see. But that's enough about the press. There's more to tell. Wait a bit! … One could go on talking about Poincaré for hours—I can't explain everything to you, offhand, like that. Let's turn to his policy at home. It lines up with the other. Naturally enough. To begin with, a general speeding up of armaments—a godsend for the steel and iron industries, whose power behind the scenes is simply tremendous. Next, the period of military service has been increased to three years. (I suppose you followed the debates in the Chamber? You remember Jaurés's speeches?) Then, they've been working on public opinion. You were saying just now: 'Nowadays no one in France dreams of military glory.' Do you mean to say you haven't noticed how a jingoistic, war-mongering spirit has been gaining ground in France during the last few months, especially among the younger generation? Here, too, I'm not exaggerating, I assure you. And this, too, is Poincaré's doing. He has his scheme. He knows that when mobilization does come the government will need the support of a public opinion heated to fever-pitch and ready not only to accept and follow his lead but to back him up and cry him on. The France of 1900, the France of the Dreyfus affair, was too peace-minded. The army was under a cloud; people had lost interest in it. They took security for granted. Somehow, then, the nation had to be roused, alarmed. The young folk, especially of the middle class, provided a favourable soil for sowing the seeds of chauvinist propaganda. And they were not long in striking root."

"That a certain number of youngsters have turned nationalist, I won't deny," Antoine broke in. He was thinking of his young assistant Manuel Roy. "But they're a very small minority."

"A minority that's growing larger every day. A very truculent minority. Their greatest joy is forming in groups, wearing badges, waving flags, marching in military formation. On the slightest pretext, nowadays, you find them staging a demonstration round Joan of Arc's monument or the Strasbourg statue. And there's nothing more catching. The man in the street—the petty clerk, the small shopkeeper—is not indefinitely proof against such sights, such appeals to fanaticism;' particularly as the press, at the bidding of the government, is working on people's minds along the same lines. It's gradually being hammered into the French people that they're in danger, that their security depends upon their ability to use their fists, that they've got to show their force and put up with a huge rearmament plan. The country has been deliberately infected with what you doctors call a neurosis—the war neurosis. And when once that collective apprehension, that frenzied panic, has been injected into a nation, it's child's play to drive it into the most suicidal follies.

"That's how matters stand. Mind you, I don't say: 'One of these days Poincaré will declare war against Germany.' No, Poincaré isn't a Berchtold. But if peace is to be maintained, people must believe it to be possible. Acting on the principle that a clash is unavoidable, Poincaré has thought out and carried on a policy that, far from staving off the risks of war, has actually brought it nearer.

Our armaments, keeping step with the Russian preparations, have scared Berlin, as was only to be expected. The German military party has improved the occasion to speed up its own. The tightening of the Franco-Russian Alliance has confirmed the morbid fear of encirclement in Germany; so much so, indeed, that German generals are openly declaring that a war is the only way out. Some go so far as to say it'll have to be started as a precautionary measure! And all this is largely Poincaré's doing. The one and certain result, the diabolical result, of the Isvolsky-Poincaré policy has been to drive Germany into becoming what Poincaré fancied her to be: a war-mad nation, a beast of prey. We're moving in a vicious circle. And if within three months from now France is involved in a European war—a war for which Russia has paved the way, step by step, a war that Germany will perhaps allow to break out so as to take advantage of a favourable opportunity—yes, if there's a war, what will happen Poincaré will shout exultantly: 'You see what we were up against! You see how right I was to insist upon the need for a more powerful army and more reliable allies!' And he'll never guess that his psychology was at fault, that by playing up to Russia and always prophesying the worst, he was, appearances notwithstanding, one of the men actually responsible for that war."

Antoine had made up his mind to hear his brother out, but his private opinion was that Jacques's tirade had little weight behind it. He had detected several contradictions in its course. His logical, matter-of-fact intellect rebelled against a line of argument which struck him, on the whole, as feeble, badly arranged. He was greatly tempted to return a verdict of ineptitude against his young brother, whose views once again struck him as superficial, not to say childish. Yes, Jacques was a mixture of good-heartedness and inexperience. Even supposing there were really some such vague menace looming in the background, Poincaré, whose influence (though as President he stood outside party politics) was still predominant, would not fail to dispel the storm-clouds in good time. He was a man to be trusted; he had given proof of great political acumen. Rumelles thought very highly of him. To fancy that a levelheaded man like Poincaré could wish for a war of revenge was mere silliness, and no less silly was it to imagine that without wanting it, simply because he supposed it possible or imminent, he would behave in such a way as to make it inevitable. All that was merest moonshine. The most elementary common sense sufficed to show, on the contrary, that Poincaré—and, like him, every French statesman—was stubbornly determined at all costs to spare his country the ordeal of war. For scores of reasons. First and foremost because he was aware, no one better, that neither Russia nor France was in a position to be sure of ultimate success. Hadn't Rumelles said so only the other day? Jacques himself, for that matter, had tacitly admitted that the Russian means of transport and strategic roads were inadequate, since it was to remedy these defects that Russia had just raised a loan of six hundred millions. As for France, the law of three years' military service, which was held to be of vital necessity to bring her establishment up to the German level, had only just been passed, and had not yet taken effect… . Still, Antoine was not equipped with enough precise data to enable him to demolish his brother's arguments, as he would have liked to do. So, prudently he kept his peace. The course of events would certainly give the lie to Jacques, and to those queer foreigners in Switzerland, the scare-mongers under whose influence he now was.

Jacques had ceased speaking, and suddenly looked quite fagged out. He pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face and the back of his neck.

He was well aware that his passionate harangue had not convinced his brother. And he knew why. He had been foolish enough to pour out, higgledy-piggledy, without attempting to set them out in order, a medley of arguments on very different lines—political, pacifist, revolutionary—which were for the most part vague echoes of palavers in the Talking Shop. At that moment he too was cruelly conscious of the ineffectiveness with which his brother secretly reproached him.

During the week he had been in Paris he had spent most of his time inquiring into the outlook of the French Socialists, and had busied himself rather with their reactions to the threat of war than with the problem of national responsibility.

His eyes wandered restlessly to and fro across the room, without settling on any object. At last they came to rest on his brother, who had remained motionless, his head propped on his hands and his gaze fixed on the ceiling.

"In any case," he began in an unsteady voice, "I really don't know why I let myself go like that. Obviously there's more that might be said on the subject, but there are others who could do it far better than I can. Let's say I am unjust toward Poincaré, that I've an exaggerated view of France's responsibility. That's not what really matters. What does matter is that war is coming nearer. That it's up to us, at all costs, to avert that peril."

Antoine gave an incredulous smile, which exasperated his brother. "You and people like you," Jacques cried, "it's positively criminal the belief you have in your security! When at long last the middle class makes up its mind to see things as they are, it will be too late. Events are moving at breakneck speed. Read today's *Matin*, the issue of July 19. It talks about the Caillaux trial. About the summer holidays, seaside hotels and the prices they are charging. But you'll find as well in the editorial columns an article that wasn't put in by accident, and begins with a phrase potent as an explosive: '*If war should break out* . . That's how things stand. The Western world is like a powder magazine. A spark let fly by chance would touch it off. And people like you go on talking about war in the tone of voice you used just now—as if you thought of war as just a word, a trivial word, and uttered it accordingly! When you refer to war, none of you thinks of the unprecedented slaughter, the millions of innocent victims it involves. Oh, if only your imagination could shake off its apathy just for a moment! Then you'd all be up and doing—you, Antoine, would be among the first to move! Out to do something, somehow to stave war off before it is too late!"

"No!" Antoine's voice was calm. For a few moments he stayed thus, lost in thought. Then, "No," he said again. "That's not *my* line!"

Perturbed as he might be, for all his seeming calm, by the issues his brother had just raised, he refused to allow any real uneasiness to get a grip on him, to ruffle the even tenor of the life he had built up and on which his peace of mind depended.

He drew himself up a little, folding his arms. "It's 'No' I tell you!" he repeated with a stubborn smile. "I'm not the sort of busybody who goes out of his way to interfere in world affairs. I've a job of my own to attend to, thank goodness! I'm a man who at eight a.m. sharp tomorrow will be on duty at his hospital. There's that phlegmon case in bed No. 4; a peritonitis in No. 9. Every day I've a score of poor little brats to attend to, and it's my job to get them out of the mess they're in. That's why I say 'No' to everything else. A man who has a profession can't allow himself to be switched off it to go and dabble in affairs he doesn't know a thing about. *I* have my job cut. It's up to me to solve certain specific, limited problems, which I'm competent to tackle, and on which the future of a human life depends—of a whole family, quite often. Now do you see? I've other things to do than fumble with Europe's pulse."

His private opinion was that those who are responsible for the nation's welfare are by definition experts used to dealing with international problems of all kinds, and that these experts should be trusted blindly by non-experts like himself. And the confidence

he had in the French leaders he likewise extended to the rulers of other countries. He felt an innate respect for specialists.

Jacques was observing him with unwonted attention. He suddenly wondered whether that famous mental balance of Antoine's, which in the past he had admired as a triumph of reason, a victory of mind over the chaos of events, and which had always inspired him with mingled envy and vexation, were not merely the defensive armour of one of those active-sluggard people who always keep on the move, rather like athletes in perpetual training—just to prove to themselves of what stuff they are made. Or, to put the matter more fairly, might not Antoine's pose be a happy consequence of the limited and, truth to tell, rather restricted scope he had assigned to his activities?

"You talk of a war neurosis," Antoine went on. "That's all buncombe. I don't allow the importance you do to psychological factors. Politics is concerned essentially with practical matters, hard facts. And in politics generous impulses count for even less than in other fields of activity. So even supposing the dangers you see ahead are real, there's nothing we can do about it. Absolutely nothing. Neither you, nor I, nor anybody!"

Jacques jumped up angrily. "That's not true!" he cried, moved by an indignation he was now unable to control. "What! Faced with such terrible possibilities, you'd have us believe there's nothing to be done but to bow to the storm, and carry on with our silly little jobs, and meekly wait for the cataclysm to overwhelm us! It's perfectly monstrous! Fortunately for the nations, fortunately for people like you, there are men on the watch who won't hesitate to risk their lives, tomorrow if need be, to save Europe from disaster."

Antoine bent forward; his interest was aroused. "What men do you mean? Yourself, for instance?"

Jacques walked up to the sofa. His irritation had subsided. He gazed down on his brother, his eyes alight with pride and confidence.

"Is it news to you, Antoine, that there are twelve million *organized* workers in the world?" He spoke calmly, but beads of sweat were forming on his forehead. "Are you aware that the international Socialist movement has behind it fifteen years of struggle, fifteen years of loyal cooperation and continuous progress? That there afe today large Socialist groups in every Parliament in Europe? And that the twelve million supporters of the movement are distributed over more than twenty different countries? Yes, there are more than twenty Socialist organizations linking together all the ends of the earth in one world-wide brotherhood. And do you realize that their ruling thought, the bond uniting them, is their hatred of militarism, their firm resolve to struggle against war in every shape or form, in whatever quarter it may arise? For war, you know, is always a capitalist expedient to make the masses …"

"Dinner is ready, sir," Léon announced, opening the door.

Cut short, Jacques mopped his brow and went back to his chair. Then, when the servant had left the room, he said, by way of conclusion, in a low voice: "Now, Antoine, perhaps you have a better idea why I've come to France. …"

For a few moments Antoine gazed at his brother without speaking. The sinuous line of his brows had stiffened to a bar above the deep-set eyes, showing the tension of his thoughts.

"Quite so," he observed at last, ambiguously.

There was a brief pause. Antoine had changed the position of his legs, and was now sitting up on the sofa, propping himself on his hands, and staring at the carpet. Then he gave a slight shrug and rose to his feet.

"Well, let's have dinner, anyhow," he said with a smile.

Jacques followed his brother without a word. He felt his clothes sticky with sweat. Half-way down the passage, he remembered his glimpse of Antoine's bathroom. The temptation was too strong to be resisted.

"Listen," he suddenly remarked, blushing like a child. "It's damned silly, but I'd love to have a bath. At once, I mean, before dinner. Any objection?"

"Not the least, old man!" Antoine smiled. The absurd notion flashed through his head that he was having a small revenge on Jacques. "A bath, a shower, anything you like. I'll show you the way."

While Jacques was luxuriating in the water, Antoine, who had gone back to his study, took Anne's letter from his pocket. He read it once more, then tore it up, for he made a point of never keeping any letter from a woman. He was chuckling inwardly, but only the ghost of a smile flickered on his lips. Then, going back to the sofa, he lit a cigarette and settled down again among the cushions.

He gave himself to thought—not about war, nor about Jacques, not even about Anne, but about himself. "I'm an utter slave to my profession, that's a fact," he mused. "I never have time to apply my thoughts to anything else. This business of keeping one's mind engrossed with patients, or even with medical research, isn't real thinking in the sense I mean—which is, or should be, trying to get the hang of things in general. But I haven't any time for that. I'd feel as if I were cheating my work of its due. Am I right, I wonder? Is a professional career really the only thing that counts? Is it even the whole of my own life? I'm not so sure. Under Thibault, the physician, I feel there's someone else: *myself*. And that self of mine has been suppressed—for years and years. Ever since I passed my first exam, perhaps. That day I stepped into the cage, and it closed on me for ever. The man I was, the man I used to be before I became a doctor—the man I still am, when all's said and done—is like a seed buried too deep; it's given up trying to develop. Yes, its development ceased with that very first exam. And all my brother doctors are just the same. All men with a calling must be like that, I imagine. The best, of course. For it's always the best who sacrifice their personalities, who submit to the all-absorbing tyranny of a profession. We're rather like free men who have deliberately sold themselves for slaves."

His hand, thrust into his pocket, was fidgeting with the little engagement-book he always had with him. Mechanically he drew it forth and ran his eye over the page for the next day—July 20. It was crowded with names and memoranda.

"By Jove, yes!" he suddenly reminded himself. "It's tomorrow I promised Thérivier to go and see his little girl again, at Sceaux. And I must be back in my consulting-room by two."

He crushed the stub of his cigarette in the ashtray and stretched his legs. "That's Thibault, the medicine-man cropping up again."

He smiled to himself. "Well, well! Life, after all, means action. Not philosophizing. What's the use of musing upon life? Everybody knows what life is: an absurd jumble of wonderful moments and infernal bothers! That point has been disposed of once for all. Living doesn't mean to be perpetually calling everything in question."

Drawing himself up with a vigorous forward lunge of his shoulders, he rose to his feet and took a few steps which brought him to the window. "Life is action," he repeated, gazing vaguely down upon the empty street, the closed shop-windows, the sloping roofs on which the declining sun cast long shadows of the chimney-pots. He was still fumbling with the little engagement-book in his pocket. "Tomorrow's Monday; we'll be doing in that guinea-pig for the little fellow in bed 13. It's a thousand to one the inoculation will turn out to be positive. A nasty business, losing a kidney when you're only fifteen. And then there's that confounded kid of Thérivier's. I'm out of luck, this year, with all these septic pleurisy cases. Another couple of days, and if there's no turn for the better, we'll have to remove the rib… . Damn it all!" he suddenly exclaimed, letting the curtain fall back into place. "The 'one thing needful'—isn't it just that: to do one's job properly? And let life have its way?"

He moved back into the middle of the room and lit a cigarette. "Yes, life will have its way… . And Master Jacques will have his say!" Amused by the foolish jingle, he began singing the couplet to a little tune: "Yes, life will have its way. And Master Jacques his say! …"

# Chapter XVI

THE meal began with cups of chilled soup, which the two brothers drank in silence, while Léon, white-coated like a barman, gravely sliced a melon on the marble-topped sideboard.

"There's going to be fish, some cold meat, and salad," Antoine announced. "That do you all right?"

In the new dining-room, with its bare panelling, blank mirrors, and a long sideboard that took up the full length of the wall opposite the window, there reigned an atmosphere of depressing, if majestic, emptiness. Antoine, however, seemed quite at ease in this spacious setting. Just now his face wore an expression of the utmost cordiality and good humour. So delighted was he at having his young brother with him once more that he could wait without impatience for their conversation to resume its course.

But Jacques kept silent. He was paralysed by the room's lack of intimacy and the absurd distance between him and his brother; they were separated by the entire width of a table at which a dozen guests could have sat down in comfort. The servant's presence added to his constraint; every time Léon came to change a plate he had twice to walk half the room's length, coming and going between the table and the dumb-waiter; and Jacques found himself unwillingly following with his eyes the movements of the white, wraithlike figure gliding to and fro. He hoped Léon would disappear after serving the melon. But he lingered on, filling their glasses. "That's something new," Jacques said to himself. In the past, not to pour out his wine, as and when he felt inclined, would have been almost unbearable to Antoine.

"This is a 1904 Meursault," Antoine said, raising his glass to admire the limpid amber glow. "It'll go well with the fish. I found about fifty bottles of it in the cellar; but Father'd let our cellar pretty well run out."

Stealthily he was examining his brother, with more attention now.

Jacques was in a brown study, gazing out of the open window. Above the house-tops the sky glowed with a roseate sheen of mother-of-pearl. How often on such summer evenings, in his childhood, had he gazed out at those selfsame roofs and house-fronts, those windows with their dingy awnings and closed shutters, and rows of ferns in pots aligned along the balconies!

"Tell me, Jacques," Antoine suddenly inquired, "how are you getting on? Are you happy?"

Jacques gave a start and shot a wondering glance at his brother.

"Yes"—Antoine's voice was affectionate—"I want to know if you're happy, *anyhow*!'

An uncomfortable smile hovered on Jacques's lips. "Oh, you know," he murmured, "happiness isn't something one can turn on like a bath-tap. I rather think it's a gift. Perhaps I haven't got that gift."

Then he caught a professional look in his brother's gaze, lowered his eyes, and kept silent. He did not wish to resume the discussion broken off a little while before, but his mind kept harking back to it. Opportunely the sight of the family plate—the oval dish on which Léon was serving him the fish, the sauce-boat with the handle shaped like an ancient Roman lamp—diverted his thoughts to the family dinners of his boyhood.

"And how about Gise?" he asked abruptly—as if she had suddenly come back to his mind after months of forgetfulness.

Antoine jumped at the opening. "Gise? She's still abroad. She seems happy; I hear from her now and then. She came here on a visit, at Easter, for two or three days. She's a young lady of more or less independent means now, thanks to Father's legacy."

He vaguely hoped that this allusion might lead to a conversation about the family property, for he had never taken seriously his brother's rejection of his share. With the family lawyer's approval he had made arrangements for an equitable partition of the estate and had instructed his bankers to administer Jacques's share until such time as the latter retracted his absurd decision.

But the allusion was completely lost on Jacques. "Is she still in the convent?" he asked.

"No. She's left London and is living in the suburbs now, at Kingsbury, in a sort of boarding-school—it's connected with the convent, as far as I can make out—with a number of other girls of about her age."

Jacques almost regretted having so rashly broached that particular topic. He could never think of Gise without a certain discomfort. There were too many reasons for believing that he alone was responsible for the girl's exile, for her flight from everything that might remind her of the past, and for the frustration of her hopes.

Antoine went on with a quiet, indulgent laugh. "You know how she is. It's just the life for her. A sort of communal life without any strict rules, in which her time's divided between good works and games. Yes," he repeated in a faintly hesitant tone, "it seems she's happy there."

Jacques hastened to start his brother on another trail. "And Mademoiselle?"

During the previous winter Antoine had mentioned in a letter that the old lady had moved into a home.

"I must admit," Antoine replied, "that I only know of her by hearsay, through Adrienne and Clotilde."

"Are they still with you?"

"Yes. I kept them, as they got on so well with Léon. They never miss going to visit Mademoiselle on the first Sunday of each month."

"Where's the home?"

"At Le Point-du-Jour. Do you remember the Superannuates' Home in which Chasle put his mother—and ruined himself doing it? No? You didn't hear the story? One of the old loony's most priceless exploits, that was… ."

"What's become of the old fellow?" Jacques asked, smiling despite himself.

"Chasle? Oh, he's going strong. He keeps a gadget-shop in the Rue des Pyramides—the vocation he was born to, according to him. And I must say he seems to be making a success of it. You should drop in at the 'Mart' if you happen to be around that way. His partner is another quaint bird. The pair of them would have delighted Dickens."

For a moment, back on familiar, fraternal ground, they laughed in unison.

"As for Mademoiselle …" Antoine began after a pause, then hesitated, obviously embarrassed. He seemed particularly eager to explain to Jacques just what had happened. When he continued, it was in that easy, urbane tone of his, which rang new for Jacques. "You must understand, old man; the idea that Mademoiselle would end her days anywhere but in this house never crossed my mind…

. All right, Léon; put the salad-bowl on the table, we'll help ourselves… . It's a watercress salad," he added, for Jacques's benefit, as he waited for Léon to go out. "Will you have it with the cold meat, or after?"

"After."

"I may tell you frankly," Antoine went on, after making sure they were alone, "I'd never have stirred a finger to get the poor old thing to leave. Still, I don't deny it suited my book, finding her so keen on going. There really wasn't any place for her in my new domestic arrangements… . Well, it wasn't till she realized Gise was determined to live in England that she got the idea of entering the home. Gise was quite ready to take her aunt with her to England, for them to live together. But no, the old lady had her fixed idea: the home. Every day after lunch she used to fold her skinny hands and start the same refrain, wagging her little head at me. 'I've told you again and again, Antoine. In the state I'm in … I don't want to be a drag on anybody. I'm seventy-four, and considering the state I'm in …' I used to say: 'That's all right. We'll talk about it tomorrow.' Then one day—why shouldn't I admit it? It simplified things immensely, you know—I gave in. You don't think I was wrong, do you? Anyhow, I made a point of seeing everything was done in style. For one thing, I paid the highest rate on their scale of charges, to make sure they'd do the old lady proud. I went to the home myself and chose two rooms opening into each other, and had them done over thoroughly and the furniture from the room she had here moved into them, so that she wouldn't notice the change too much. That way, she couldn't have the feeling of being thrown on the scrap-heap, so to speak, could she, now? As it is, she's more like a lady of modest means living in a boarding-house."

He cast an anxious look at his brother and was evidently reassured by Jacques's expression of approval, for he began to smile at once. "So that's that!" he added cheerfully. "But I don't believe in humbugging oneself, and I don't mind telling you it was the devil of a relief when she cleared out of here!"

He fell silent, and picked up his knife and fork again. For some minutes, absorbed in his story, he had ceased eating. Now, his eyes bent on his plate, he was skilfully dissecting a leg of duck. He seemed absorbed, but it was obvious his attention was directed toward something other than his fingers' neat activity.

# Chapter XVII

"I'M THINKING of your twelve million workers," he suddenly remarked. "Tell me, does this mean you've joined the Socialist Party?" His head was still bowed over his plate, and he kept it thus, though his eyes rose to observe his brother.

Jacques parried the question with a movement of his head that might have been a nod. As a matter of fact he had not received his Party member's card till a few days back. It was only at the threat of a European conflagration that he had renounced his independence, feeling it his duty to join the Socialist International, the one organization with energy and manpower to cope with the forces making for war.

As Antoine handed him the salad, he casually inquired: "Are you quite sure, old man, that your present life, in these—er—political surroundings, is really the life that suits you best? Does it give enough scope to your intellectual abilities, to your literary gifts—let's say, to your real personality?"

Jacques slammed the salad-bowl onto the table; he was furious with his brother. "Antoine," he thought, "is getting to talk more and more like Father—just the same pompous style."

Antoine was obviously making an effort to speak in a detached, neutral tone. After some hesitation he put a direct question. "Really, deep down inside you, do you think you were born to be a revolutionary?"

Jacques gazed at his brother, a wry smile on his lips. His face clouded over, and he did not reply at once. His lips were quivering when he spoke again. "What's made me a revolutionary," he said, "is having been born here, in this house, the son of a bourgeois father. It's having had to witness as a child, day after day, all the injustice which keeps our privileged class on top. It's having had always, from my boyhood up, a vague feeling of guilt, of complicity—yes, a rankling sense that, though I loathed the whole system, I profited by it."

Antoine was about to speak; but Jacques stayed him with a gesture and went on. "Long before I knew what capitalism was, before I'd even heard the term, when I was twelve or thirteen—do you remember?—I was up in arms against the world around me, against my schoolmates, my teachers; against Father's world, his charitable societies, and the rest of it."

Antoine was meditatively stirring the salad in the bowl. "Why, yes!" he conceded with a slight laugh. "I'm the first to acknowledge that the world you speak of creaks at the joints a bit. Still, its axle has been well ground in, and it goes on turning more or less smoothly—by sheer force of habit. You shouldn't be so hard on it. That world has its virtues and responsibilities; its greatness, too. Not to mention its amenities," he added with the air of genial unconcern which, more even than his words, antagonized his brother.

"No!" Jacques exclaimed, his voice vibrant with emotion. "The capitalist world is indefensible! It has created ridiculous, inhuman relations between man and man. It's a world in which all values are perverted, where there's no room for respecting human personality, where self-interest is the only motive and the one ambition is to amass more and more wealth. A world in which the magnates of high finance have it all their own abominable way; they can mislead public opinion by their venal press, and have even the government at their beck and call. It's a world where the individual, the worker, is reduced to nothingness, where …"

"So according to you," Antoine broke in—he too was beginning to lose his. temper, "the worker doesn't profit at all -by the increased production we have in the world today?"

"What he gains by it is paltry, negligible! The only ones who really profit by it are company promoters and shareholders, bankers and big business men."

"Whom naturally you picture as idle pleasure-seekers, battening on the workers' sweat, and gorging caviare and champagne in the company of pretty ladies!"

Jacques did not even deign to shrug his shoulders. "No, I picture them as they are, Antoine. At least, as the best among them are. Far from idle; quite the opposite. But pleasure-seekers, yes! The lives they lead are at once laborious and luxurious—cheerfully laborious, shamelessly luxurious. Wholly satisfying lives, because they combine all possible pleasures—all the enjoyment and excitement of doing jobs that exercise the mind, the sporting thrill of competition, of taking chances, plotting and scheming, and winning through. And they have all the satisfactions that money, social prestige, the mastery over men and things, can bring. In a word, the life of the privileged few. Well, can you deny that?"

Antoine said nothing, but in his heart he judged all that as windy rhetoric, a tissue of commonplaces, the public speaker's stock-in-trade. Still, he was conscious that his annoyance prevented him from being wholly just, and that the problems raised in his brother's divagations had their importance. "Far more difficult problems," he mused, "than Jacques, and those like him who see only one side of the picture, imagine. There's no limit to their complexity, and the people who should tackle them aren't humanitarian utopia-merchants but scientists, great thinkers who're immune from passion and trained in scientific methods."

"The capitalist system," Jacques concluded, with an angry glance at his brother, "was in the past, no doubt, a factor for progress. But in our time, in the inevitable course of things, it's become a force opposed to common sense, to justice, to the dignity of man."

"Hear! Hear!" Antoine smiled. "Finished your tirade?"

They fell silent. Léon had come in, and was changing their plates.

"Put the cheese and fruit on the table," Antoine said. "We'll help ourselves." He turned to his brother and asked in a deliberately casual tone: "Cream cheese or Dutch?"

"Neither, thanks."

"What about a peach?"

"Yes, I'd like one."

"Wait, I'll choose it for you."

He purposely stressed the note of cordiality.

"Now let's talk seriously," he added, after a moment, in a conciliatory tone that took the sting out of the remark. "What exactly is 'capitalism'? I must admit I haven't much use for catchwords of that sort—especially of words ending in 'ism.' "

He expected the remark to disconcert his brother. But Jacques looked up quite calmly. His irritation seemed evaporating; indeed, a faint smile hovered on his lips. For a moment his eyes lingered on the open window. Night was falling and, above the dingy house-fronts the glow was dying from the sky.

"Personally," he explained, "when I speak of capitalism, I mean just this: a certain distribution of the world's wealth and a certain way of turning it to account."

Antoine pondered for a moment, then nodded approval. Both were equally relieved to feel their conversation was taking a less combative turn.

"I hope that peach is ripe, anyhow. Some sugar?"

"Do you know," Jacques said, without answering the question, "what most revolts me in capitalism? That it has divested the worker of everything that made him a man. It has uprooted him, wrenched him away from his village, from his home, from all that gave some human individuality to his life, and penned him in the industrial areas. The craftsman has been deprived of all the noble satisfactions of his handiwork. He's been brought down to the level of an insect, a laborious ant toiling in the anthill factories of capitalism. Have you any idea how the work is organized in those hellish places? Do you realize the literally inhuman separation that prevails between the manual, mechanical side of industry and—how shall I put it?—its intellectual side? Do you know what a factory-hand's daily round has come to be, the soul-deadening slavery of it? In former times that man would have been a craftsman, with a little workshop of his own, keen on his job. Now he's doomed to be nothing, as an individual; nothing but a cog in the wheel, a trivial part of one of those immense machines whose mysteries he need not even guess at, to carry out his task. Mysteries which are the prerogative of a select few, always the same persons: the directors and the engineering staff."

"For the simple reason that men with brains and competence are always in the minority."

"Man has been robbed of his personality, Antoine. That's the crime of capitalism. It has turned the worker into a machine; no, worse than that, the slave of a machine."

"Steady, there!" Antoine protested. "For one thing, what you're up against isn't capitalism but the age we live in, the 'machine age.' And then—don't you see you're overcolouring the picture? I'm very far from believing there's the hard-and-fast barrier between the workman and the skilled engineer that you describe. Oftener than not there's a give-and-take, an actual collaboration between them. The factory-hand to whom his machine is a 'mystery' is very rare. He wouldn't have been able to invent it, I grant you, nor perhaps put it together, but he has a very shrewd idea how it works, and quite often can suggest improvements on the technical side. In any case he likes his machine, is proud of it, looks after it, and keeps it in good running order.

Studler, who's been over to the States, has some remarkable things to tell about the 'mechanical craze,' as he calls it, that's come over the American workmen… . Then there's the case of my hospital—it's not so very different from a factory, by and large. There, too, you have employers and employees, men who use their brains and men who use their hands. I'm an employer of labour, in my way. Well, I assure you, the fellows under my orders, down to the lowest ward attendant, have nothing 'servile' about them, in the sense you'd give the word. We all work together for the same end—to cure our patients—each according to his capacities. I'd like you to see how bucked up they all are when our joint efforts have brought off a difficult cure."

Jacques listened with growing irritation. "Antoine," he thought, "is always so cocksure about his views." Still, he was conscious of having opened the discussion with a foolish gambit, seeming to base his case against capitalism mainly on the distribution of labour in industrial concerns.

Mastering his feelings, he replied: "It isn't so much the nature of the work under the capitalist system that's so revolting; it's the conditions under which it's done. Of course, I've nothing against mechanized industry as such; what I dislike is the way a privileged class exploits it for selfish ends. If we made a rough cross-section of the present social order, we should find on the one hand a favoured few, wealthy middle-class folk, some of them industrious and efficient, others mere idlers and parasites, who between them own everything, have everything their own way, keep all the big jobs to themselves, and all the profits, too. On the other side we would find the masses, the actual producers, the exploited—the innumerable herd of slaves."

Antoine made a gesture of amusement. "Slaves?"

"Yes."

"No, not slaves," Antoine replied good-humouredly. "Just citizens. Men who, in the eyes of the law, have exactly the same rights as their employer or the expert; whose votes count the same; to whom nobody can dictate. They can work or not, according to the desires they want to gratify; they can choose their trade, their factory, and change them if they like. If they're bound by contracts these are contracts that they've freely agreed to, after talking things over. Can you call such men slaves? Slaves of whom, of what?"

"Of their poverty. You're talking like a perfect demagogue, my dear Antoine. All those liberties are eyewash. In actual fact the worker's never independent, dogged as he is by want. All that stands between him and starvation is what he can earn by work. Therefore he's compelled to offer himself, shackled hand and foot, to the bourgeois group that has all the jobs in its pocket and fixes wages. You said just now that skilled men, the experts, are a minority; of course I realize that. It isn't superior skill as such that I'm against… . But just see how it works out: the employer, if he thinks fit, gives a job to the workman who needs food, and pays him certain wages. But those wages never represent more than a minute fraction of the profits earned by the workman's industry. The employer and the shareholders pocket the balance."

"And rightly so. That balance represents what's due to them for what they put into the business."

"Quite so. Theoretically, I agree, those profits are due to the employer for his management of the business, and to the shareholders for being kind enough to lend their money to it. (I'll come back to that point.) But let's compare the figures; let's compare the profits with the wages. Those profits are the lion's share, grotesquely out of proportion to the services rendered by the men who get them. What's more, they enable the bourgeois to consolidate and increase his ascendancy. He doesn't use the money to raise his standard of living, but treats it as *capital* to invest in other concerns, and so, inevitably, it keeps on growing. And it's this wealth, capitalized at the workers' expense, which has given the well-to-do class its absolute power during so many generations—a power which is based on the most ghastly injustice. For (this is the point I said that I'd come back to) the supreme injustice isn't simply the disparity between the income the capitalist draws from his investment and the wages of the man who sweats at the machine. No, the flagrantly unjust thing is this, that money works for its possessor, multiplies automatically, without his having to stir a finger. Money breeds money *ad infinitum*. Have you ever thought of that, Antoine? Yes, that diabolical invention the banking system has provided the gang of

profiteers with a highly perfected instrument for buying up its slaves and battening on their drudgery. A horde of nameless, undistinguished slaves, not in the least alarming, and so well kept out of sight that, to salve one's conscience, one can easily pretend to know nothing of their miserable existence. That, to my mind, is the supreme iniquity, that tithe levied on the toil and sweat of others—on the most immoral, most hypocritical of pretexts."

Antoine thrust his chair back from the table, lit a cigarette, and folded his arms. Darkness was falling now so quickly that Jacques could see little of the changes of expression on his brother's face.

"And I suppose," Antoine remarked in an ironical tone, "your revolution's going to charm all that away with a touch of the wand?"

Jacques pushed back his plate and, resting his elbows on the table, cast a defiant look at his brother across the gathering dusk.

"Yes. As things are now the worker is an isolated unit, powerless, at the mercy of his daily needs. But the first result of the revolution will be to give him political power. Then he'll be able to make a fresh start, set up new institutions, a new code of laws. The one thing evil, you see, is this exploitation of man by man. In the coming world such exploitation will cease to be possible. That's the world we're out to build. A world in which the wealth inequitably hoarded up by parasitic bodies like your big businesses and banks will be put into circulation, so that every member of the community profits by it. Nowadays the poor devil who produces the goods has so much trouble in making sure of the minimum he needs to live on that he has neither time nor energy, not even the desire, to learn to think, to make the best of his faculties. When we say that the revolution will abolish the proletarian condition, that's what's meant. In the view of true revolutionaries, the revolution shouldn't merely give the worker a more comfortable life; above all, it should change the relations between men and their work, so that the work itself becomes more 'human,' instead of being a dreary, never-ending round of toil. The worker should have leisure, and cease being a mere tool; should have time to think about himself and make the most of his abilities, his human qualities. Yes, he should become, so far as in him lies—and his capacities for that are far less limited than people think—a man with a mind, a personality, of his own."

He had spoken of "capacities less limited than people think" in the compelling voice of one who is convinced of what he says; but a more heedful listener than his brother might have detected an undertone of doubt.

Antoine was thinking things over. "Really," he said at last, "I've nothing against your plans—assuming that they're feasible. But how are they to be carried out?"

"There's only one way: by a revolution."

"Leading to a dictatorship of the proletariat?"

"Exactly. That'll be needed to start off with." Jacques sounded thoughtful. "But I'd rather call it a government by the producers—that word 'proletariat' has served its time. Even in revolutionary circles they're trying nowadays to get rid of the old liberal-humanitarian jargon of '48."

But inwardly he admonished himself. "That's not true." He remembered his own "jargon" and the discussions at the Talking Shop. "Still," he mused, "we'll have to come to that."

Antoine, who had hardly listened to his brother's last remarks, said nothing. He was thinking out the implications of a "dictatorship." One by the proletariat seemed to him feasible enough, and he could easily picture it existing in certain countries—in Germany, for instance. But in France it seemed to him quite definitely ruled out. Such a dictatorship, in his opinion, could not become effective merely by switching the gears into reverse; to ensure its success it would need time to dig itself in, to show economic results, to strike root deeply in the rising generation. That would require at least ten or fifteen years of unremitting tyranny, repression, expropriation, human suffering. And would a country like France, composed of rampant individualists, clinging to every shred of personal liberty, France with its innumerable small investors, a land in which even the revolutionaries, for the most part, retained, unknowingly, the tastes and habits of the small private owner—would such a land for ten consecutive years put up with the iron discipline that would be needed? It was the merest moonshine even to dream of such a thing!

Meanwhile he grew aware that Jacques was rambling on with his indictment.

"Only with the overthrow of capitalism will its control and exploitation of all human activities come to an end. The possessive appetite of the exploiting class is insatiable. The industrial progress of the last twenty years has only served to increase its power, and its ambition is to get all the world's wealth into its clutches. So blind is its greed for expansion, for conquering new fields, that the various elements of world capitalism, instead of forming an alliance to rule the world between them, are actually trying to cut each other's throat, regardless of their most obvious interests—like a rich man's heirs fighting over the estate. That, indeed, is the one root cause of the war that looks about ready to start." He seemed haunted by that thought of an impending war. "But this time, quite likely, they'll find they're up against forces they haven't reckoned with. The workers, thank goodness, aren't the lamblike creatures they used to be. This time they won't allow the greed and internecine quarrels of the propertied classes to plunge them into a disastrous war, of which once more the workers would bear the brunt. For the moment the revolution can wait. The first thing is, at all costs, to prevent a war. After that …"

"Yes? After that?"

"Oh, we've lots of definite plans to carry out. The most urgent, of course, will be to make the most of this triumph of the leftwing parties, the revolt of public opinion against the imperialist governments, and make an effective bid to seize the reins of power. Then we'll be able to impose a rational system of production on the world—on the whole world, naturally."

Antoine was listening attentively. He made a gesture showing he quite saw what Jacques meant, but his faint smile implied he was less sure about endorsing it.

"Of course I know," Jacques went on, "it's not going to be easy. To bring it about, the revolutionaries will have to take drastic measures; enter on a state of active rebellion." The phrase was Meynestrel's and, speaking it, Jacques's voice had the Pilot's crisp, curt intonation. "It's going to be a stiff fight. But we shall be forced to set about it. Otherwise the workers of the world may be obliged to wait for half a century yet to win their freedom."

There was a short silence. Antoine was the first to speak. "And have you the men you need to carry out these … fine schemes of yours?"

He was doing his best to prevent their debate from growing heated and to keep on impersonal lines. He hoped, ingenuously enough, that he would thus convince Jacques of his good will, broad-mindedness, and impartiality. But, far from being grateful to his brother, Jacques was annoyed by this overscrupulous detachment, which he knew was feigned. The accent of self-assurance and the

faintly bantering tone which Antoine could not keep out of his voice when conversing with his young brother never let Jacques forget that Antoine, conscious of his age, was talking down to him from a pedestal of ripe experience and wisdom.

"The men? Certainly we have them," Jacques proudly said. "But often the great men of action, the inspired leaders, aren't those we reckoned on; a crisis throws up new men." For a few silent moments he was lost in dreams of the future. His voice was gentler when he spoke again. "There's nothing fanciful about my ideas, Antoine. That the world's moving toward socialism is a patent fact—no one can ignore it. Our final triumph will be hard-won and, I'm much afraid, accompanied by a general upheaval and by bloodshed. But for those who have eyes to read the signs of the times there can be no doubt about the issue. And looking further ahead, we may foresee one world-wide government."

"And a 'classless' world." Antoine's tone was ironical.

Jacques went on as if he had not heard. "An entirely new regime which, in its turn, I suppose, will raise a host of unexpected problems. But at least it will have solved the problems which are crushing the life out of mankind today—the economic problems. There's nothing chimerical about it, I repeat; and with such an end in prospect, no hope is too high."

Jacques's faith and fervour, the emotional effect of which was heightened by the semi-darkness of the room, served only to harden Antoine's scepticism.

" 'A state of active rebellion,' " he mused. "All very fine—but we've heard that slogan before. Those noble efforts to remould the world always involve too high a cost, and never lead to any permanent improvement. These feather-brained idealists are always in a hurry to smash things up and start a new regime. But when they've got it going, they find it has created a new set of evils and, on balance … It's the same in medicine; people are always in too much of a hurry to try new treatments."

Though less severe on the contemporary world than Jacques was, and though in general he fell in with its ways readily enough—partly from indifference, partly through natural adaptability, and also because he was inclined to trust the "specialists" in charge of world affairs—Antoine was far from looking on it as a perfect world. "Yes, he's right in a way," he now was thinking. "The conditions of life can and should be constantly ameliorated; that's a law of civilization, indeed of life. But by degrees."

"And to achieve all that," he said aloud, "do you think there's nothing for it but a revolution?"

"Yes, I've come to think so." It sounded like a confession. "Oh, I can see your idea; for a long time I had it too. I managed to convince myself that reforms within the framework of the constitution would suffice. But now I've ceased to think that."

"But surely that socialism you believe in is steadily gaining ground year by year, isn't it? All over the world, even in despotically ruled countries like Germany?"

"No. In fact, the changes you're thinking of actually prove my point. Such reforms alleviate the effects of the disease, but they never attack its *causes*. And that's only natural. However excellent the intentions we attribute to the men making these reforms, in practice we find they're always on the side of the economic system which it's our task to combat and overthrow. And you can't expect capitalism to sap its own foundations, effect its own destruction. When the capitalists are in a tight corner owing to the discontent they've provoked, they take over from socialism such reforms as cannot be dispensed with. But that's all."

Antoine held his ground. "It's a mistake to cry down half-measures. For, after all, even those partial reforms are so many points scored for the social ideal that you're championing."

"Bogus points, trifling concessions made with reluctance and changing nothing fundamental. In those countries you mentioned—what vital change has been brought about by reform? The moneyed class has kept its power intact; it still controls labour and has the masses in its toils; still manipulates the press and bribes or browbeats the public authorities. There's only one way to make a satisfactory job of it, and that's to make a clean sweep of the existing system and replace it by the Socialist plan in its entirety. Like town-planners who, to get rid of slums, have to pull them down completely and rebuild everything. Yes," he added with a sigh, "it's my profound conviction now that only a revolution, a tremendous upheaval starting from below and utterly disintegrating the old order, can rid the world of the virus of capitalism. Goethe held we had to choose between injustice and disorder, and he preferred injustice. I think differently. I don't believe that without justice any real order can be established; anything, in my opinion, is preferable to injustice. Anything! Even"-—he lowered his voice—"the shambles of a revolution." ("If Mithoerg could hear me just now," Jacques suddenly reflected, "how he'd love it!") He fell silent, lost in thought. At last he spoke again.

"The only hope I have is that perhaps in certain countries bloodshed may be avoided. It wasn't necessary to set up our guillotine of '93 in all the capitals of Europe for the republican ideas of '89 to spread abroad and change the world. France had opened up a breach through which the other nations marched successfully. Very likely it will be enough if one nation only—Germany, for instance—pays the price in blood; then the new order will take root, and the rest of us, with the German precedent before our eyes, will work out our destinies on peaceful lines."

"I'm all for your upheaval"—Antoine grinned—"provided it takes place in Germany! But," he continued in a serious tone, "I can't help wondering what you and your friends will make of it when it comes to building up that new world of yours. For, try as you may, you can't get around the fact that you must build it of the same human material. And if there's one thing that never changes, it's human nature."

Jacques had suddenly turned pale. To hide his discomfiture, he turned away.

Unwittingly Antoine had touched his brother's most sensitive spot, the secret doubt that always rankled like an ulcer in his mind. That faith in the coming race which was the *raison d'être* of revolution, and indeed gave an impetus to the whole movement, came to Jacques only by fits and starts, under the brief stress of others' enthusiasm. He had never managed to share that faith instinctively. His pity for his fellow-men was boundless, and he had given up his life to them wholeheartedly; but, for all his desperate efforts, for all his fervent reiterations of the Party's slogans, he remained sceptical as to the possibilities of human nature. For deep inside himself he felt a tragic disability: he did not, could not, believe sincerely in the theory taken as a gospel by his friends, the theory of man's spiritual progress. He was quite ready to believe that, by a radical change of human institutions, by reconstructing the social edifice, it would be possible to amend, adjust, and indeed perfect the lot of man. But he could not bring himself to assume that the new social order would renew mankind itself, and, as a matter of course, produce an intrinsically better type of humanity. Every time he became alive to this crucial doubt so deeply rooted in his very being, he felt an agonizing rush of shame, remorse, despair.

"I've no particular illusions," he admitted in a slightly changed voice, "as to the perfectibility of human nature. But I do hold that man, as we find him today, has been warped, not to say ruined, by the social system foisted upon him. By oppressing the worker, this

system degrades him, weakens him morally, makes him over to his lowest instincts, and crushes out of him any tendencies to raise himself which he may possess. I don't deny that these base instincts are innate; but I do think—I want to think—that he has other instincts as well. I believe that our civilization prevents these better instincts from maturing and putting the others in their place, and that we've the right to expect men to be different when what is best in them has been given a chance of making good in freedom."

Léon had just opened the door. He waited for Jacques to finish speaking before announcing in a colourless voice: "I've served the coffee in the study, sir."

Antoine looked round. "No, bring it here. And turn on the light, please; only the cornice lights."

A pale glow spread across the ceiling, filling the room with a mild, agreeably diffused radiance.

"Wait a moment!" Antoine was far from guessing that on their present topic he and his brother held very similar views. "There we come up against a crucial issue. For all those simple souls, man's imperfection is caused by the rottenness of the existing order; so it's only natural they should have a blind faith in the efficacy of a revolution. But what if they saw things as they are, if they realized once for all that man's a pretty vile creature—and there's nothing to be done about it! Every social system's doomed to reproduce the failings, the incurable defects of human nature. So what's the use of running the risks of a general upheaval?"

"The hideous waste going on today," Jacques began in a low, sullen tone, "isn't only on the material plane… ."

Léon's entrance with the coffee-tray cut him short.

"Two lumps?" Antoine asked.

"One only. Thanks."

There was a moment's silence.

"All that," Antoine murmured, smiling, "well, my dear fellow, there's only one word for it: it's Utopian."

Jacques scowled at him. For the "my dear fellow" he had had exactly his father's voice. Jacques was conscious of his temper rising, and yielded to it; it would take his mind off his discomfiture.

"Utopian!" he exclaimed. "You don't seem to realize that there are thousands of quite sensible people for whom these 'utopian' projects constitute a carefully thought-out plan of action. And they're only waiting for a chance to get it under way." His thoughts had flashed back to Meynestrel, to the Russian theorists at Geneva, to Jaurés. "Quite likely both of us will live long enough to see these Utopian projects worked out implacably in some corner of the globe and giving rise to a new order of society."

"Yet," Antoine protested, "men will still be men. There'll always be successful men and underdogs. Only the men on top won't be the same. And their power will be based on different institutions, different customs from ours. These men will form a new group of profit-takers, a new ruling class. That's a law of life. Meanwhile, what will have become of the good features—and you must admit there are some—of our civilization?"

"Yes." Jacques seemed to be talking to himself, and his brother was struck by the sadness in his voice. "Yes, the only way of answering people like you would be to bring about some striking and *successful* 'utopia.' Till that comes, you're on velvet! Like all those who feel comfortably off in the world today and want to keep it exactly as it is, at all costs."

Antoine set down his cup brusquely.

"But I'm quite ready to welcome a changed world!" he exclaimed with an eagerness that gave Jacques pleasure to hear. That's something anyhow, he thought; to have kept at least an open mind.

"You've no idea," Antoine went on, "how independent I feel, how remote from any social obligation! Why, I'm hardly a good Frenchman! I've my profession, and it's the only thing I stand by. As for the rest, well, you can reorganize the world—outside my consulting-room—to your heart's content, for all I care. If you think you can fix up a social order in which poverty and waste, stupidity and the lower instincts, will cease to exist; a society without injustice, without privilege or graft, in which the law of the jungle—eat or be eaten!—has been superseded, well, the sooner you get down to it, the better. I hold no brief for capitalism. It's the prevailing system, the system I was born into and under which I've lived for thirty years. I'm accustomed to it and put up with it; in fact, whenever I can, I make use of it. But I'm quite ready to adjust myself to changed conditions. And if you've really found a better plan, more power to you! All I ask for myself is to be allowed to carry on with my vocation. And I'll agree to anything you like except being told to drop the one thing that gives value to my life. In any case," he continued cheerfully, "however perfect your new regime may be, even if you succeed in developing a feeling of fraternity among men, I doubt if you'll be able to do the same thing for their health! Disease, and consequently doctors, will always exist, so there won't be any great change in my relations with the rest of mankind. Provided," he added with a flutter of the eyelids, "that your socialized world allows me …"

There was a sharp ring at the doorbell. Antoine pricked up his ears. Nevertheless, he finished off his phrase.

"… allows me a certain liberty—yes, that's my sine qua non!—a certain professional freedom. Freedom of thought, freedom to work in my own way; with all the risks and responsibilities, of course, that it involves."

He stopped speaking, and listened.

They heard Léon open the hall-door, then a woman speaking.

Pressing his hand on the table, Antoine prepared to rise, a look of professional gravity already settling on his face.

Léon appeared at the door, but before he could utter a word the girl behind him burst into the room.

Jacques gave a start and suddenly went pale. He had recognized Jenny de Fontanin.

# Chapter XVIII

JENNY had not recognized Jacques, perhaps not even noticed him. She walked up to Antoine, her face convulsed.

"Please come at once. Father's wounded."

"Wounded!" Antoine repeated. "Seriously? Where?"

She raised a trembling finger toward her right temple. The gesture, the horror written on her face, taken with what little Antoine knew of Jerome de Fontanin's past, led Antoine immediately to surmise a tragedy—attempted murder, or suicide, more likely.

"Where is he?"

"At a hotel. I've the address. Mamma's there, waiting for you. Do please come!"

"Léon!" Antoine shouted. "Tell Victor to get the car out at once!" He turned again to the girl. "At a hotel? How did it happen? When was it?"

She did not reply. Her eyes had just lit on the other person in the room—Jacques!

He was looking down, but he felt Jenny's gaze upon his face, burning like fire.

They had not had sight of each other since that summer at Maisons-Laffitte—four years ago.

Antoine moved hastily toward the door. "I'll fetch my instrument case."

Now that she was alone with Jacques, Jenny began to tremble. She was staring at the carpet, and the corners of her lips were twitching imperceptibly. Under the stress of an emotion such as a minute earlier he would have deemed impossible, Jacques dared not draw a breath. Both looked up at the same moment, and when their eyes met, the pupils were dilated with anguish and amazement. A look of terror, veiled instantly by the dropped lids, fluttered in Jenny's eyes.

Unthinkingly Jacques went toward her. "Anyhow, do sit down," he said awkwardly, drawing up a chair.

She did not move. Statue-still she stood under the flooding light, the shadows of her lashes flickering on her cheeks. She was wearing a close-fitting tailor-made costume in navy-blue, which accentuated her height and slimness.

Then Antoine bustled into the room, his hat already on his head. Léon followed, bringing two emergency kits, which Antoine began spreading out on the table, meanwhile pushing the dinner-plates aside.

"Now give me some details, please. The car will be here in a minute. How was he wounded—with what? Léon, go and fetch a box of compresses—quickly."

As he spoke he took a forceps from one of the kits and slipped it into the other. His gestures were hurried, but always deft and sparing of unnecessary movement.

"We don't know anything," said Jenny. (The moment Antoine entered, she had darted to his side.) "It's a revolver shot."

"Ah!" Antoine exclaimed without looking at her.

"We didn't even know he'd come to Paris. Mamma thought he was in Vienna."

She spoke in a subdued voice, breathless but assured. Overwrought as she clearly was, she still gave an impression of strength and courage.

"The people from the hotel where he's staying came and told us. Half an hour ago. Mamma dropped me here on the way. She wouldn't wait, as she was afraid …"

Léon's entry with a nickel-plated instrument case in his hand cut her short.

"Right!" Antoine said. "Now we'll start. Is it far to the hotel?"

"It's 27A Avenue de Friedland."

Antoine turned to Jacques. "Coming along?" It sounded less a question than an order. Then he added: "You might come in useful, you know."

Jacques glanced at Jenny without replying. She made no sign, but he had an intuition that she agreed to his accompanying them.

"Come along!" Antoine said.

The car had not left the garage, and the courtyard was bathed in the glare of the headlights. While Victor rapidly closed the hood, Antoine helped Jenny in.

"I'll sit in front," Jacques said, taking the seat beside the chauffeur.

They made a quick run to the Place de la Concorde, but there was so much traffic in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées that the car had to slow down.

Sitting at Jenny's side, Antoine deferred to her silent mood. He had no qualms about relishing those familiar yet always pleasurable moments, the period of suspense and pent-up energy that precedes the time for taking action and responsibility. Absent-mindedly he stared out of the window.

Huddled in a corner, as far as possible from any human contact, Jenny was trying in vain to overcome her fit of trembling; she was quivering from head to foot like a jarred crystal.

From the moment when an unknown hotel waiter, whom *Mme.* de Fontanin had admitted into the flat with some suspicion, had announced in a surly tone that "the gent in No. 9 has just put a bullet through his head," to the moment when she had alighted from the taxi, in which she and her mother had been holding hands without a word, without a tear, all her thoughts had been for the wounded man. But then—miracle of miracles!—she had seen Jacques; and her father had passed clean out of mind. There, just in front, was a dark, stalwart form from which carefully she kept her eyes averted—an all-too-real presence that thrilled every fibre of her being. Clenching her teeth, she pressed her left arm against her heart to still its tumult. For the while she was quite incapable of analysing that rush of uncontrollable emotion. Those few minutes had been enough to plunge her back into that great tragedy of her life, the experience that had all but killed her and from whose shadow she had thought to have escaped for ever.

The brakes went on suddenly; she looked up. The car had had to stop dead at the traffic-crossing of the avenue, to allow a regiment to pass.

"It's always like that when one's in a hurry!" Antoine grumbled, turning to Jenny.

A troop of young men in close formation, flourishing Chinese lanterns, was following the band. All were keeping step and lustily joining in the chorus of the marching song the band was playing. On either hand a dense crowd, held back by lines of policemen, was cheering the vociferous youngsters and saluting the colours as they passed.

After making sure that Jacques did not lift his hat to the colours, the chauffeur kept his own on, and ventured to remark: "Only to be expected. In this part of Paris, them fellows have it all their own way." Encouraged by Jacques's scornful shrug, he added: "In my part of the town, in Belleville, they've had to stop their damned demonstrations. They always ended up in a free-for-all."

Just then the procession swerved to the left, leaving the road clear. A few minutes later the car was speeding up the slope that led into the Avenue de Friedland.

Antoine had the door open before it stopped, and jumped out at once. With an effort Jenny rose and, declining Antoine's proffered arm, stepped onto the sidewalk. For a moment she stood there unmoving, dazzled by the shaft of light that issued from the entrance of the hotel; her head was spinning and she could hardly keep from falling.

"Follow me," Antoine said, gently touching her shoulder. "I'll lead the way."

Pulling herself together, she quickly stepped in after Antoine. She dared not look round; she was wondering: "Where is *he*?" Even at that tragic moment it was not to her father that her thoughts turned.

The Westminster was one of the numerous hotels in the vicinity of the Arc de Triomphe which are used principally by foreigners. The little lobby was brightly lit; at the far end, across a glazed door, they had a glimpse of a lounge in which groups of people were smoking and playing cards, to the strains of a small band concealed behind a row of palms.

At Antoine's first remark the porter signed to a plump lady, caparisoned in black, at the cashier's desk. She rose at once and with a hostile air led them rapidly to the elevator. The elevator-door clanged to. With a sense of vast relief, Jenny noticed that Jacques was not coming up with them.

Before she had time to steady her nerves, she found herself on the landing, facing her mother.

*Mme.* de Fontanin's face was at once haggard and serene. The first thing to catch Jenny's notice was that her mother's hat was awry, and this small sign of carelessness so unlike her mother moved her even more than the grief-stricken eyes.

*Mme.* de Fontanin had an opened envelope in her hands. She clutched Antoine's arm.

"He's in there. Come!"

Quickly she led him down the corridor.

"The police have just gone. He's alive. We've got to save him somehow. The hotel doctor says he can't be moved." She turned to Jenny. "Wait for us here, darling." She wished to spare the girl the sight of her wounded father.

She handed Jenny the envelope, which had been found on the floor beside the revolver. The address on it had enabled a message to be sent at once to her apartment in the Rue de l'Observatoire.

Left to herself on the landing, Jenny began deciphering her father's letter as best she could in the dim light. Her name, Jenny, in the concluding lines, caught her eye.

> I beg my Jenny to forgive me. Somehow I've always failed to show her my affection… .

Her hands were shaking. In vain she tautened every sinew, trying to quell the riot of her blood throbbing in every vein down to her fingertips, but somehow she forced herself to read the letter through from the beginning.

> Thérèse, do not judge me too harshly. If only you knew all I have been through before coming to this! And how I grieve for you now, sweetheart; how I regret the sufferings I've brought on you, you so kind and so true! I'm bitterly ashamed; for always I have returned you evil for good. And yet I always loved you, sweetheart. If only you knew! I love you and I have never loved anyone but you.

The words seemed to flicker out under her tearless, fevered eyes, which kept on wandering from the paper to cast apprehensive glances toward the elevator-shaft. Jacques's nearness filled her thoughts. Her dread of seeing him reappear was so intense that she was hopelessly unable to fix her attention on that pitiful farewell which her father, on the brink of death, had hastily pencilled on the sheet before her; the words by which, before making that final tragic gesture, he had shown that his last thoughts were for her: "I beg my Jenny to forgive me… ."

She looked round to find some place where to hide, to take shelter. Her eyes fell on a bench in a corner; she stumbled toward it, sat down. She made no effort to analyse her emotions. She was too tired. Gladly she would have died there so as to have done with it all, to escape—from herself.

But she could not control her imagination. Memory cast on the screen a pageant of the past streaming before her eyes with the insensate swiftness of a dream. The enigma began for her with those last months of the summer of 1910, at Maisons-LafEtte. Before that she had seen Jacques growing daily more and more in love with her, more and more set on winning her affection. And she, too, had been alarmed at finding herself growing daily more affected by his presence, her resistance weakening. Then suddenly, without a word of warning, without even a line of explanation, without the least extenuation of the affront given her by this brusque *volte-face*, he had ceased coming. Soon after, Antoine had rung up Daniel; Jacques had disappeared! Then had begun for her that phase of agonizing doubt. Why had he disappeared—killed himself, perhaps? What was the secret that her wayward lover had taken with him into the unknown?

Throughout October 1910 she had anxiously followed the fruitless efforts made by Antoine &nd Daniel to trace the fugitive. She had never betrayed her agony of mind to any of those around her, not even to her mother. It had gone on for months. Alone, in silence and bewilderment, lacking even the consolation of true religious faith, she had somehow managed to survive in that stifling atmosphere of mystery. Obstinately she concealed not only her despair but her physical sufferings too: a general collapse due to the violent shock she had received. At last, after a year of unaided efforts, of convalescence broken by relapses, she had achieved a certain peace of mind. Her body remained to be cured. On the doctor's advice she had spent a summer in the mountains, and moved

to the South of France when the winter cold began. During the previous autumn, in Provence, she had learned from a letter of Daniel's to her mother that Jacques had been found; he was living in Switzerland, and had come to Paris for M. Thibault's funeral.

For some weeks she had been the prey of a vast unrest, but it had passed away of its own accord, and with such surprising swiftness that she had had the impression then, for the first time, of being definitely cured. Yes, all was over between her and Jacques. Nothing remained! So she had thought at the time. And now, this evening, at the most poignant moment of her existence, he had incredibly appeared again: her lost lover with the changeful eyes, the sullen face.

She was leaning forward on the seat, her eyes still fixed apprehensively on the staircase. Her thoughts were running riot. What of the future? Was a chance meeting, the hazard of two glances, enough to stir up all the dregs of the past, to demolish in one brief hour the physical and mental balance she had taken years to recover?

Meanwhile, complying with a sign from his brother, Jacques had stayed in the vestibule.

The lady in black satin had resumed her seat at the cashier's desk, and now and then gave him a hostile glare above her glasses. The hotel orchestra, composed of a piano and one shrill violin, was struggling through a tango for the benefit of a single couple of dancers, of whom Jacques had brief glimpses through the glass door. In the dining-room some belated diners were finishing their meal. A clatter of crockery came from the kitchen, and tray-bearing waiters flitted to and fro, discreetly murmuring as they passed the cash-desk: "An Evian for No. 3," "No. 10's bill, Miss," "Two coffees for 27."

A chambermaid came running down the stairs. With a wave of her pen, the lady in black directed her toward Jacques. She was bringing a note from Antoine: "Telephone Dr. Héquet to come at once. Passy 0913."

A waiter led Jacques to the telephone-booth. He recognized Nicole's voice at the other end, but did not tell her who was speaking.

Héquet was at home, and came to the telephone at once. "I'm starting right away. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

The cashier was waiting outside the booth. She had a deep mistrust of everything that had to do with "the fool in No. 9": a sick man in the hotel was bad enough; a case of suicide, outrageous!

"You know, sir, things like that can't be allowed in a respectable hotel. You'll have to get him moved immediately."

Antoine had just come down the stairs. He was bareheaded and alone. Jacques went up to him at once.

"Well?"

"He's in a state of coma. Have you phoned?"

"Héquet's on his way."

The lady in black bore down on them imperiously. "Are you the family doctor?"

"Yes."

"We can't keep him here, it's out of the question. You must have him taken to the hospital."

Paying no attention to her, Antoine led his brother to the other end of the vestibule.

"What happened?" Jacques asked. "Why did he try to kill himself?"

"Haven't any idea."

"Is he staying here by himself?"

"I believe so."

"Are you going upstairs again immediately?"

"No. I'll wait to have a word with Héquet. Let's sit down."

But hardly was he seated when he stood up again.

"Where's the phone?" He had just remembered about Anne. "Watch the entrance. I'll be back in a minute."

Anne was lying on the sofa. The room was in darkness, with the windows open but the blinds drawn. When the telephone-bell rang, she had a swift intuition that Antoine would not be coming, and could not bear to listen to his explanations.

"Well, do you understand?" He was puzzled by her silence.

She could not answer. Something seemed to grip her throat, crushing her life out. At last she murmured brokenly: "You can't mean it, Tony!"

The voice, so faint, so different from her normal voice, held his vexation in suspense.

"I can't mean it? What's that? I tell you, he's unconscious. I'm waiting for the surgeon."

Her fingers stiffened with exasperation on the receiver; she dared not speak again for fear of bursting into tears.

He waited.

She forced herself to speak. "Where are you now?"

"In a hotel. Near the Arc de Triomphe."

Like a far echo she repeated: "The Arc de Triomphe!" Then, after a long pause, added: "But that's close by. You're quite near me, Tony."

He smiled. "Yes, it's not so very far."

She guessed the smile from the sound of his voice, and suddenly took hope.

"I see your idea." He was still smiling. "But, as I said, I'll have to stop here all night. You'd better be sensible, dear, and go straight home."

Quickly she whispered: "No! I shan't budge." She hesitated. "I'll be waiting for you."

Letting herself sink back, she drew a deep breath, holding the receiver at arm's length. From very far away a drone of words came to her.

"… if I can get away, yes. But don't count on it too much. Good night, darling."

She brought the receiver hastily to her ear, but Antoine had hung up. She lay back again on the sofa, and stared up into the darkness, her body tense and throbbing, limbs knit together.

"Mme. de Fontanin's really an admirable woman," Antoine said as he came back and sat down beside Jacques. He was silent for a while, then asked: "You haven't seen Jenny again, since …?" He had just remembered his brother's disappearance, "*La Sorellina*," all

the suspicions he had entertained about that puzzling tale.

Jacques's face darkened; he shook his head.

A car stopped at the hotel entrance. They saw Héquet standing at the front of the steps. His wife was with him. Nicole had never really forgiven her uncle Jerome; she held him responsible for her mother's lapse from grace, and saw the hand of God in his inglorious end. But she did not wish to leave her aunt Thérèse and Jenny alone in their hour of trial.

Héquet paused for a moment in the doorway and, from behind the pince-nez, his keen eyes swept the vestibule. He saw Antoine coming toward him, but did not recognize Jacques, who stayed discreetly in the background.

Antoine had not met Nicole again since the night before her little daughter's death. He knew that, soon after, Nicole had given birth to a dead child under difficult conditions which had left her maimed for ever, body and soul. She had grown thinner. All the youth and hopefulness had gone out of her expression.

She held out her hand to him. As their eyes met, a slight frown settled on her face, for she associated Antoine with the bitterest moments of her life. And now again, it struck her, she was meeting him in a tragic atmosphere, in the shadow of death.

Talking in the surgeon's ear, Antoine shepherded him toward the elevator. As the gate closed, Jacques had a glimpse of his brother placing his forefinger on a point at the upper margin of his temple.

The lady in black had darted forth from her retreat.

"Is he a relation?"

"He's the surgeon."

"But surely they don't intend to operate on him *here!*"

Jacques turned his back on her.

The orchestra had stopped playing. The lights in the dining-room were out. The station bus deposited a silent young couple—English, apparently—with smart, brand-new luggage.

Ten minutes passed; then the chambermaid appeared again, with another note from Antoine: "Ring up the Baudrand Hospital, Neuilly 5403. Say Dr. Héquet wants ambulance sent immediately for emergency case. They're to get operating-room ready."

Jacques telephoned at once. As he left the booth he ran into the cashier, who had been leaning against the door. She gave him an amiable, relieved smile.

He saw Antoine and Héquet crossing the hall. The surgeon drove off by himself.

Antoine went back to Jacques.

"Héquet's going to try to extract the bullet tonight. It's the only chance… ."

Jacques looked at him questioningly. Antoine made a wry face. "The skull is badly smashed. It will be a miracle if he pulls through. Now, listen!" He moved toward a writing-table near the entrance of the lounge. "Mme. de Fontanin wants Daniel to be informed; he's at Luneville. Will you take the telegram to one of the offices that stay open all night, to the one at the Bourse, for instance?"

"Do you think they'll give him leave?" Jacques had remembered that Europe was on the brink of war, and Luneville was a frontier town.

"Of course. Why not?" Antoine asked uncomprehendingly.

He had begun composing the telegram at the writing-table. Then he changed his mind, and crumpled up the telegraph-blank, remarking: "No. The safest thing's to wire direct to his colonel." He took another blank and began again, murmuring as he wrote: "Very urgent … request grant leave … Sergeant Fontanin. His father …" He stood up.

Docilely Jacques took the telegram. "I'll see you later at the hospital, I suppose? What's the address?"

"Just as you like. It's 14 Boulevard Bineau. But what's the use your coming?" he added after a moment's thought. "The best thing you can do, old man, is to go home to bed." He was on the point of asking Jacques where he was staying and proposing to put him up, but he thought better of it. "Call me up tomorrow morning before eight, and I'll tell you what's happened."

As Jacques was going away, he called him back. "By the way, you'll have to wire to Daniel, too, to give him the address of the hospital."

# Chapter XIX

IT WAS just midnight when Jacques left the Bourse telegraph office. He was thinking of Daniel, picturing his friend opening the telegram he had just sent off, signed "Dr. Thibault." For a while he lingered on the edge of the sidewalk, gazing across the lighted, almost empty square. There was a dull ache in his limbs, as if a bout of fever were coming on, and he felt dizzy. "What's wrong with me tonight?" he wondered.

Then, energetically, he drew himself up and crossed the street. The air seemed more limpid, but the night was sultry still. He walked aimlessly ahead. "What's wrong with me?" Suddenly the picture of Jenny rose before his eyes: Jenny, pale and slim in the blue coat and skirt, as he had just seen her after all those years, so unexpectedly. But in a flash he dispelled the vision, almost without an effort.

By the Rue Vivienne he came to the Boulevard Poissonniere, and halted. The boulevards, which on that warm summer Sunday evening had so far been almost empty, were entering on the crowded hour following the closing of the theatres. The Café terraces were packed with people. Open taxis were speeding past in the direction of the Opera; along the sidewalks, too, the crowds streamed westward. Some smart-looking ladies in huge, flowered hats were moving against the current toward the Porte Saint-Martin, eyeing every likely male.

Standing at the corner, with his back to a shop-window, Jacques watched the flowing tide of carefree Parisians. So Antoine's blindness was shared by everyone! Among those laughing passers-by was there one who guessed that Europe was already struggling in the toils? Never had Jacques been so poignantly aware how the fate of unthinking millions lies in the hands of a few men chosen almost haphazard, into whose keeping the nations recklessly commit their safety.

A newspaper-vender shuffled by, crying lackadaisically: "*La Liberté, La Presse*, late edition."

Jacques bought the papers and scanned them under a street-lamp. *"The Caillaux Case. M. Poincaré's Russian Visit. The Cross-Paris Swimming Contest. Mexico and U.S.A. Jealous Husband Slays His Rival. Tour de France Cycle Race. The Balloon Grand Prix. Closing Prices."* Nothing!

Again a thought of Jenny glanced across his mind, and hastily he decided to return to Geneva on the following day, forty-eight hours earlier than he had planned. The decision gave him a surprising sense of relief.

Meanwhile, suppose he looked in at the offices of the Humanité? Almost light-heartedly he turned into the Rue du Croissant. The district, in which most of the papers were at that hour in process of being printed, teemed with life, and Jacques threaded his way across a human antheap. Bars and café were brilliantly lit up and thronged with customers; a hubbub of voices poured through the open windows into the streets.

A small gathering in front of the *Humanité* building blocked the entrance. Jacques shook hands with some. They were already discussing a piece of news that Larguest had just transmitted to the "Skipper." An exceptional deposit of four billion francs in gold, known as the "war reserve," had recently been paid into the Banque de France.

The group began to disperse. Some suggested rounding off the night at the Café du Progrès, a restaurant near by, where Socialists in quest of red-hot news could count on finding newspapermen ready to impart it.

Jacques was invited to join them there for a glass of beer. He was already an accepted figure in such circles, and was sure to come across old friends. They knew he had been sent from Switzerland on a mission, treated him with a certain deference, and did their best to help him in his task by furnishing information. Nevertheless, for all their trust and good-fellowship, many of these militant Socialists, who came from the working class, looked on Jacques as an intellectual, a well-wisher yet an "outsider" by the accident of birth.

At the Café du Progrès they had secured for themselves a fair-sized, low-ceiled room on the first floor, to which the proprietor, a member of the Party, admitted only known adherents. That night some twenty men, old and young, were gathered round the beer-splashed, marble-topped tables. The air was dense with cigarette smoke, acrid with the fumes of beer. They were discussing an article by Jaurés, which had appeared that morning, on the line the Socialist Party should take in case of war.

Cadieux, Marc Levoir, Stefany, Berthet, and Rabbe were there, grouped round a bearded giant of a man, fair-haired, pink-cheeked—Tatzler, a German Socialist whom Jacques had already met in Berlin. Tatzler was declaring that the article would be reproduced and commented on by all the German press. According to him, the speech that Jaurés had recently made in the Chamber to justify the Socialists' refusal to vote supplies for the President's trip to Russia—a speech in which Jaurés declared that France had no desire to be "pitchforked into peril"—had produced a deep impression across the Rhine.

"And so it did in France," said Rabbe, a bearded man with a curiously gnarled skull, who had once been a typesetter. "That's what led the Fédération de la Seine to pass that motion for a general strike if and whenever a war seemed threatening."

"Will your German workers," Cadieux asked, "be prepared, and are they disciplined enough, to go on strike automatically, if your Social-Democratic Party approves of and gives orders for it, even in the face of an impending mobilization?"

"I'll turn the tables on you!" Tatzler retorted with a confident, good-humoured guffaw. "If general mobilization's ordered here, do you think your French working class is disciplined enough?"

"That would mainly depend," Jacques broke in, "on the attitude of the German proletariat."

"Personally I'd answer: 'Yes, undoubtedly!' " Cadieux exclaimed.

"I'm not so sure," Rabbe said. "I'd be more inclined to say 'No.' "

Cadieux shrugged his shoulders. He was a tall, lean, loosely built man, who was to be seen everywhere—on committees, at the Labour Exchange, at C.G.T. headquarters, in editors' rooms and government offices—always in a hurry, dashing here and there, inapprehensible. He was usually to be seen in transit between two calls, and no sooner did one decide to buttonhole him than he had vanished. The sort of person who is always recognized a shade too late, when he has just gone by.

"Yes? No?" Tatzler grinned with all his teeth. "Well, with us, it's *gerade* so. *Ach*, do you know," he suddenly exclaimed, rolling his blue eyes, "in Germany they're very much worrying about your Poincaré that's visiting the Tsar!"

"Yes, damn it!" Rabbe grunted. "Couldn't have chosen a worse moment. In the eyes of the whole world we look like we're giving our official blessing to the Greater Russia policy."

"Especially," Jacques remarked, "when you read our press. The leaders in our French daily papers sound a provocative note that's positively disgusting."

"Do you know what?" Tatzler went on. "It's because Viviani, your Foreign Minister, is there that everyone thinks they must be planning a diplomatic crusade against 'Germanismus' at St. Petersburg. In my country we know for sure that Russia it is who forced France into making a three years' military service law. *Wofür*? Because the Pan-Slavism, it threatens Germany and Austria always more."

"Still, things are in a bad way in Russia," said Milanov, who had just entered and taken a chair beside Jacques. "The French papers hardly mention it. But Praznovsky, who has just come over from Russia, has lots to tell. A strike movement has started in the Putilov works and it's spreading like wildfire. Day before yesterday, Friday, there were sixty-five thousand men out in St. Petersburg alone. The police opened fire and many people were killed. Women and girls among them."

A vision of Jenny in her blue dress rose momentarily before Jacques's eyes. To dispel the haunting vision, he turned to the Russian, saying: "So Praznovsky's here?"

"He arrived this morning. He's been confabulating with the Skipper for the last hour. I'm waiting for him. Will you stay on to see him?"

"No." Jacques felt restless—his fever was rising again—and the idea of staying where he was, hearing them thresh out the same eternal problems in this smoke-polluted atmosphere, suddenly seemed unbearable. "It's late. I must be getting home."

But, out in the street, he found the darkness and his solitude almost harder to endure than the crowded promiscuity of the Café. Quickening his pace, he started back to his hotel, which was on the left bank of the Seine, near the Place Maubert; the proprietor, a Belgian Socialist, was an old friend of Vanheede. He walked by the Halles without a glance for the picturesque confusion of farm-carts disgorging their nightly loads of fruit and vegetables. He crossed the vast, silent square fronting the Hôtel-de-Ville; the clock showed a quarter to two. It was the hour when the last prowlers of the night, men and women, as they crossed each other's trail, seem to sniff each other, like questing dogs.

He felt hot and cold at once. All the café were shut. With bowed head and leaden limbs he trugged along the river-bank, yearning for sleep … oblivion. At this hour Jenny must be keeping vigil at her father's bedside. He thrust the thought of her out of his mind.

"By this time tomorrow," he consoled himself, "I'll be many miles away."

He went up the stairs on tiptoe and groped his way to his bedroom. After a long draught of lukewarm water from the jug, he undressed at once, without even pausing to light his candle. He dropped onto the bed, and a moment later was asleep.

# Chapter XX

THE operation, which had been performed in Antoine's presence, had perforce been left unfinished. Héquet had opened up the wound and raised the splintered bones, spicules of which had become lodged in the brain. He had intended to trephine, but the condition of the patient was not such as to warrant further interference, and the two doctors gave up for the present any further search for the bullet.

They agreed that Mme. de Fontanin should be informed of the state of affairs. Out of kindness, however, they told her—as indeed was true—that thanks to the operation the patient had some chance of recovery. If his condition improved it should be possible to trace and to extract the bullet. What they did not tell her was how remote, in their opinion, that chance was.

It was fully two o'clock when Héquet and his wife left the hospital together, for Mme. de Fontanin had insisted that Nicole should go home with her husband.

Jerome had been installed in a room on the second floor, with a night nurse in charge. Antoine proposed staying the night, so as not to leave the two women by themselves. The three of them had drifted into a little parlour near the sickroom. Doors and windows stood open, yet the air seemed clogged with the oppressive silence of places where men suffer. They were haunted by the feeling that behind each door lay a pain-racked body, tossing and groaning, living down the sad, interminable hours.

Jenny sat apart, on a sofa at the far end of the room. Her hands folded on her lap, leaning stiffly against the wall, she had closed her eyes and seemed asleep.

Mme. de Fontanin had drawn her chair near Antoine's. It was more than a year since she had seen him last. Yet on the instant that the tragic news had reached her, her first thought had been to summon Dr. Thibault. He had come. Promptly he had answered her appeal, and here he was, loyal and energetic, as she had always known him.

"I haven't seen you since your bereavement," she suddenly remarked. "I know what a terrible time you had. I thought a great deal about you in those days and—I prayed for your father." She paused, remembering her one encounter with M. Thibault, at the time of the two boys' escapade, and how harsh, how unjust he had shown himself then. In a low voice she added: "May he have peace in God's eternity!"

Antoine made no answer. A silence fell on the room.

Insects were hovering round the lamp, which shed a harsh, uncompromising light on the shoddy smartness of the furniture, on the gilt scrollwork of the chairs, and on a beribboned, bilious plant languishing in a blue earthenware pot near the middle of the room. Now and again a muffled bell buzzed at the far end of the corridor, followed by a patter of footsteps on the tiled floor, then the sounds of a door gently opened, slowly closing. Sometimes, too, there came a faint far-off whimper, a tinkle of porcelain, and silence closed in again.

Mme. de Fontanin bent toward Antoine, holding her small, plump hand over her aching eyes to shield them from the glare. In an undertone she began telling him about Jerome, setting forth in broken phrases what little she knew about her husband's tangled affairs. It came easy to her thus to think aloud, for she had always felt she trusted Antoine implicitly.

He, too, listened, bending forward, looking up from time to time to exchange an earnest, understanding glance. "What a fine woman she is!" he was thinking. And how he appreciated this tranquil dignity of hers in her distress, and, no less, the womanly charm which always graced her virile qualities of mind! "Father," he thought, "was only a bourgeois. She's a patrician."

Meanwhile he did not miss a word of what she was saying. And gradually he formed an idea of the circumstances which had led Jerome de Fontanin to self-destruction.

For some eighteen months Jerome had been employed by an English firm carrying on a timber business in Hungary from its London headquarters. It was a well-established company, and for some months Mme. de Fontanin had felt assured that at last her husband had found stable employment. In point of fact, however, she had never been able to ascertain exactly what his duties were. The greater part of his time was spent in trains, travelling between London and Vienna with brief halts at Paris, in the course of which he always spent an evening at his wife's apartment. He trailed everywhere with him a brief-case bulging with documents and affected a jaunty air, but was always so full of high spirits and geniality, so lavish of endearments and delicate attentions for his family, that they could not help being capitivated. What the poor woman did not mention was that certain discoveries had convinced her that her husband was carrying on two expensive love-affairs, one in Austria and the other in England. Anyhow, he seemed to be earning a good salary; what was more, he had given her to understand that he expected an increase in salary which would enable him to contribute generously to the aid of his wife and daughter. For, during the past few years, Mme. de Fontanin and Jenny had been living wholly at Daniel's expense… .When making the confession, Mme. de Fontanin was obviously torn between shame at this exposure of her husband's shortcomings and pride in the revelation of her son's devotion.

Fortunately Daniel was drawing a good salary for his work on Ludwigson's art review. Prospects had looked black for a moment when Daniel had been called up for his military service. But Ludwigson, eager to make sure of Daniel's collaboration when his period of training was over, had done the handsome thing and undertaken to pay him a reduced but regular salary during his absence. Thus Mme. de Fontanin and Jenny were assured of the indispensable minimum to live on. Jerome was quite alive to this state of things and, indeed, often referred to it. With characteristic light-heartedness he left it to his son to keep the home together. But with a show of lordly airs and graces he insisted on being informed of the exact sums thus disbursed, and never missed a chance of saying how grateful he was to Daniel. Moreover, he professed to look on this pecuniary aid as an advance made to him by his son, a loan he would repay at the earliest opportunity. He explained that he preferred to postpone payment till the "advances" came to a "round sum," and made a point of keeping an exact account of the items of this debt. Periodically he sent Daniel and Thérèse a typewritten statement of account in duplicate, in which the compound interest on the debt was worked out at a generous rate.

The ingenuous yet disillusioned air with which Mme. de Fontanin set forth the facts made it impossible to judge if she was duped or not by Jerome's unscrupulous pretences.

Just then Antoine looked up and saw Jenny's eyes fixed on him, in that gaze so dark with secrecy and solitude, so heavy with the burden of her inner life, that never could he meet it without a vague sense of discomfort. He had never forgotten that distant day when he had questioned Jenny, then a little girl, about her brother's escapade; when for the first time he had caught that look in her eyes.

Suddenly the girl stood up. "It's stifling here," she said to her mother, dabbing her forehead with the tiny handkerchief she had screwed up into a ball between her fingers. "I'm going down to the garden for a breath of fresh air."

Mme. de Fontanin nodded assent, and followed her with her eyes as she left the room. Then she turned again to Antoine. She was not sorry Jenny had left them to themselves. So far there had been nothing in her tale to account for the attempt at suicide. Now it fell to her to embark on more difficult and painful revelations.

In the course of the previous year Jerome, who had formed business connexions in Vienna, had "unwisely" lent his name and title —for in Austria he passed himself off as "Count de Fontanin"—to the directorate of an Austrian wallpaper-manufacturing concern, which after a brief career had recently gone into liquidation under suspicious circumstances. The accounts were being looked into and a judicial inquiry into the directors' conduct was on foot.

To make things worse, a suit had been instituted by the management of the Trieste Exhibition held in the spring of 1914, the wallpaper firm having occupied a costly booth in it and neglected to pay the rental.

Jerome had taken a particular interest in the Exhibition; he had induced his British employers to give him a month's leave in June, and spent it enjoying himself in Trieste. The wallpaper company had remitted to him from time to time large sums, for which, it seemed, he was unable to account; the official receiver charged Count de Fontanin with having spent the company's money on riotous living at Trieste and wilfully neglecting to pay the booth-rent. In any case, as managing director, Jerome was held responsible for the company's failure, and he was said to possess a large block of shares in the company, made over to him "without consideration" to secure his services as director.

Mme. de Fontanin had had no notion of her husband's plight till a few weeks before, when she had received a letter from Jerome— a vague but urgent appeal to her to raise another loan on the house at Maisons-Laffitte, of which she was the sole owner and on which a previous mortgage had already been contracted on his account. She had sought her lawyer's advice, and he had promptly had inquiries made in Austria. It was thus that she had learned that proceedings had been instituted against her husband.

But Mme. de Fontanin had no notion what had happened during the past few days, what new complications had led Jerome to this act of despair. She knew that some of his creditors at Trieste were daily publishing the most venomous allegations against him in a local paper. Were the charges well founded? Obviously Jerome must have judged his position past redress. Even if he managed to elude the hand of justice, he could not hope, after such a scandal, to keep his employment in the English company. Probably he had felt himself threatened on all sides, at the end of his tether, and had seen in suicide the only way out.

Mme. de Fontanin ceased speaking. In her eyes there was a dim, perplexed look, as if she were putting herself an unuttered question: "Have I done for him all I ought to have done? Would this have befallen him, had he felt me at his side as in the past?" Harrowing question, unanswerable now for ever!

With an effort she collected herself. "What can have become of Jenny? I'm so afraid of her catching cold; she may have fallen asleep down there in the open."

Antoine rose. "Don't bother to move. I'll go down and see."

# Chapter XXI

JENNY had lacked energy to go all the way down to the garden. All she wanted was to escape from the sitting-room, so as not to see Antoine.

Pressing her hand against the tiled wall to steady herself, she had taken a few aimless steps along the corridor. Though all the windows were open, the heat was suffocating. From the operating-room on the floor below, a smell of ether came in nauseating gusts that, pouring up the staircase, mingled with the warm draughts circulating through the building.

The door of her father's room stood ajar. It was in almost complete darkness; the only light came from a small lamp placed behind a screen, near which a nurse sat knitting. In the bed the outlines of a motionless body could be dimly seen, the arms stretched out along the counterpane. The head lay flat upon the pillow, the forehead swathed in bandages. The half-open mouth showed as a black cavity, from which low sounds escaped of hoarse but regular breathing.

Standing at the door, Jenny watched the mouth and listened to the stertorous respiration with a calmness, almost amounting to indifference, that startled her. Her father was dying. She knew it, repeated it to herself, but without being able to bring that tragic truth clear from the chaos of her thoughts, to consider it as a concrete, definite fact and closely touching her. It was as if her heart had frozen, grown hard as stone. Yet she loved her father despite his failings. She remembered how once, when she was a little girl, she had stood at his bedside, when he had been dangerously ill, and how the sight of his haggard face convulsed with pain had wrung her heart. Why was it she felt so terribly indifferent tonight? She forced herself to linger by the door; her arms hung limp and her eyes were fixed on the bed; she felt at once unmoved and self-reproachful, shocked by her callousness, fighting down an impulse to walk away and put this tragedy out of mind. It was as if, coming untimely on this night of all nights, her father's agony frustrated for her some last chance of happiness.

After a while she withdrew her shoulder from the doorjamb and walked to the corridor window for a breath of fresh air. A chair stood by it. Sitting down, she rested her folded arms on the windowsill, pillowing her aching brow on her clasped hands.

How she hated Jacques! He was a despicable, unstable creature. Irresponsible, perhaps; a madman.

Below, in the warm darkness of the sleeping garden, not a leaf stirred. Dimly she saw dark masses of foliage, white paths ribboning the lawns. A Japanese varnish tree cloyed the still air with pungent fumes as of some eastern drug-shop. Beyond the trees shone dotted lines of light, the street-lamps bordering the avenue. A sound came from it like the drone of a huge coffee-mill, as a never-ending file of market-gardeners' carts laboriously rumbled over the cobbles, Paris-bound. Now and then the hum of a motor drowned the rumble of cartwheels and in a burst of shrill, keen light a car flashed past behind the leafage, and vanished into the darkness.

"Don't go to sleep there!" a voice murmured in her ear.

She gave a start; an unuttered cry rose to her lips, as if Antoine had touched her.

"Let me get you a comfortable chair, anyhow."

She shook her head, rose stiffly, and followed Antoine back to the sitting-room. On the way he remarked in a low tone: "His condition is no worse. In fact the pulse has improved and there are indications that the coma is not so deep as it was."

Mme. de Fontanin had risen from her chair when they entered, and came toward them. "I've only just thought of it!" She turned impulsively to Antoine. "I should have let James know. Pastor Gregory, I mean; our oldest friend."

As she spoke she had half unconsciously slipped her arm round Jenny's waist and drawn the girl to her side, and the two faces, each marked with a different sorrow, were touching cheek to cheek.

Antoine's gesture implied that he remembered Pastor Gregory quite well. And suddenly he had an impulse to snatch at this unlooked-for pretext for escape, and to get away from the hospital, if only for an hour. He might even have time to drop in at Anne's place… . A picture rose before him of Anne in her white peignoir, asleep on the couch.

"That's easily done!" He could not keep out of his voice a cheerful undertone that betrayed his eagerness. "What's his address? I'll go and fetch him."

Mme. de Fontanin protested. "But it's miles from here—near the Gare d'Austerlitz."

"That doesn't matter; I've my car, and you can move fast at night." He added in a completely natural tone: "I'll take the opportunity of looking in at my place to see if any patients have called me up. I'll be back in an hour."

He was already half-way to the door, hardly listening to the address given him by Mme. de Fontanin or her heart-felt thanks.

"How devoted he is! How fortunate we are to have him!" she could not help exclaiming, once he had left the room.

There was a moment's silence; then, "I loathe him," Jenny said.

Mme. de Fontanin gazed at her without surprise, and made no comment. Leaving her daughter in the parlour, she went to see Jerome.

The rattle in the throat had ceased and the breath, which hour by hour was growing weaker, came and went silently between the parted lips.

Signing to the nurse not to move, Mme. de Fontanin took a seat at the foot of the bed. She had lost hope. Her eyes were fixed on the poor bandaged head; tears of which she was unconscious streamed down her cheeks.

"How handsome he looks!" she thought, her eyes still intent on her husband's face. Under the turban of cotton-wool and gauze that hid the silver locks and brought out the oriental elegance of the profile, the delicately formed yet virile features brought to mind in their frozen calm the death-mask of some young Egyptian king. A slight swelling had set in, smoothing out flaws and furrows, and in the dimly lighted room it seemed as if some miracle had given Jerome back his youth. The smooth cheeks described a flowing curve from the high cheekbones to the strongly moulded chin. The bandage had drawn up the skin of the forehead, and the line of the closed eyelids sloped up toward the temples. Slightly irritated by the anaesthetic, the lips had a sensual fullness. Handsome he was now as in their young days, when sometimes of a morning, waking early, she had pored over his sleepbound face.

With hungry eyes, aglow with devotion and passionate regret, she gazed through her tears at what remained of Jerome, the one great love of her life. She pictured him as he had been at thirty, slim and lithe as a young panther; remembering his smile, his coaxing eyes and faintly bronzed cheeks—her "Indian Prince," she had used to call him, proud of being loved by such a man. She could hear his laugh, that way he had of saying "Ha! Ha! Ha!" in three distinct sounds, throwing his head back. She recalled his gaiety, his never-failing good humour: his false gaiety, for he had always lived in a world of make-believe; deceit was his natural element—smiling, thoughtless, incorrigible deceit.

All she had known of love her whole life long now lay before her, on that bed. And yet how often had she told herself in these latter years that her love-life was over! Now in a flash she realized that she had never really given up hope. Only tonight would all be ended, all hope blotted out for ever.

Burying her face in her hands, she invoked the Divine Consoler, but in vain. An all-too-human emotion stirred in her heart, and she felt forsaken by God, the prey of carnal regrets. She could not keep her thoughts from turning shamefully toward a last sweet memory of their love. At Maisons it had been, in their country home, when she had brought Jerome back from Amsterdam after Noémie's death. One night, humbly, he had crept into her room. He had pleaded for forgiveness. Hungering for pity, for caresses, he had nestled up to her in the darkness. She had taken him in her arms and pressed him like a child to her breast. One night, one summer night like this. Beyond the open windows had glimmered the starlit forest. Thus till dawn she had watched over him, herself unsleeping while he slept in her arms like a tired child, her child. One summer night, a warm, soft, languorous night like this… .

Suddenly Mme. de Fontanin raised her head. There was a glint of frenzy in her eyes; a wild, insensate desire had come over her to drive away the nurse, to stretch herself beside him on the bed and for the last time press her body to his body's warmth, and, since he must enter on eternal rest, for the last time, the last, put him to sleep—like a tired child, her child… .

Before her on the counterpane lay, still as a hand of stone, his graceful hand with the fine-drawn, sinewy fingers and, darkly glowing on the ring-finger, a large sardonyx. It was the right hand, the hand which, daring all, had lifted the revolver. "Ah, why wasn't I with you, darling, at that moment?" she murmured in a heart-broken voice. Perhaps before raising that hand to his forehead he had called to her in his heart. And surely he would have stayed his hand if in that moment of weakness she had been beside him, had remained at her post, the post assigned to her by God for all her earthly life and which, however wronged she thought herself,-she should never have deserted.

She closed her eyes. Some minutes passed. Little by little she was regaining the serene climate of her soul, the heavensent peace of mind which, laying these phantoms of the past, remorse was bringing back to her. Once more she was entering into that communion with a Universal Power which was her never-failing help in time of trouble, and beginning to see from another angle this trial God had willed her to endure. And now she sought to discover behind the sorrow that had befallen her, the shock of which had left her bowed and broken, a divine intent, a secret purpose of the Immanent Will. And it seemed to her that at last she was nearing a haven of rest, the rest that comes of self-effacement and submission and quells every grief in those whom God has touched with grace.

Clasping her hands, she whispered: "Thy Will be done."

# Chapter XXII

WITH all its windows open, the car speeded across a city of the dead, past echoing walls, while the short summer night died on the peep of day.

Leaning well back, his arms and legs extended, a cigarette between his lips, Antoine was busy with his thoughts. A sleepless night was having its usual effect; far from prostrating him, it had tensed his nerves enjoyably.

"It's half-past three," he murmured as the car passed the clock at the Place Pereire. "By four I'll have hauled that old loony of a pastor out of bed and packed him off to the hospital; then I'll be free. It's possible, of course, that poor devil pegs out while I'm away, but the chances are he'll linger on another twenty-four hours." He felt no qualms of conscience. "Everything possible has been done," he decided, after mentally recapitulating the phases of the operation. Then, still harking back to the immediate past, he recalled Jenny's arrival, then his conversation with Jacques. After this burst of professional activity, the discussion he had had with his brother seemed to him more futile than ever.

"I'm a doctor; I've a job to do, and I do it. What more do they expect of me?"

By "they" he meant Jacques, who did nothing, had no job, but merely fussed and fumed and ranted. He also meant the horde of revolutionary agitators behind Jacques, whom he had almost fancied he could hear yelling like wolves outside his door while Jacques was talking.

"Inequality, injustice! Of course they exist. Do those fellows imagine they're the first to spot that interesting fact? But what's to be done about it? Our present civilization is a datum, damn it! We'd do best to start by taking things as they really are instead of as they might have been. And their revolution?" he murmured *sotto voce*. "A fine mess they have in store for us. Smashing the whole show up, and starting all over again—like kids playing with toy bricks. They'd do better to get on with their jobs instead of wailing about the rotten state of society—and refusing to do their share in it… . Yes, you damned fools, can't you see it's up to you to make the most of the world as it is, the age and milieu you live in, and put your shoulders to the wheel—as we do? And instead of scheming and plotting for a catastrophe—the benefits of which are problematic—to employ the short span of life that's yours in making the best of your job, in making yourselves useful in your various walks of life, however humble?"

Pleased with this tirade, he rapped out, like a closing cadence: "And that's that!"

Another wave of indignation swept over him; he had just remembered Jacques's refusal to take up his share of the estate. "Nowadays, it seems, to be well off is to lead a life that's based on the 'exploitation of one's fellow-men'! What utter nonsense! Far be it from me to stick up for the principle of hereditary succession! But damn it, since that's the law of the land at present, since we've been born into the system, what's to be done about it? … Now, what's the next traditional idea I'm going to break a lance with?" He smiled at his own audacity. "It almost looks as if I was in revolt against the things I'm trying to defend."

Then with a sudden change of mood he said aloud, as if trying to convince an objector: "In any case, I maintain that often the system of inheritance leads to excellent results. I've frequently noticed that 'coming into money,' as they call it, facilitates the making of a fine career. And by a fine career I mean one that's useful, renders service to the community at large." He folded his arms. "Is it to be accounted a crime, then, not to be poor?"

He had a vague impression that he had put the question in an unfair form. The real issue in the debate within his conscience was rather: Is it a crime to be rich when one has not earned the money by one's own labours? But he refused to linger over such fine shades of meaning and jerked his shoulders petulantly as if to shake off the small, vexatious thought.

"He wrote to me last winter: 'I do not wish to benefit by this legacy.' What a damnfool notion! To 'benefit' by it. The next thing, I suppose, will be to accuse *me* of having 'benefited' by it! And in the last analysis, who is it that will benefit by the new scope provided for my professional career, by our researches? Is it I?" He was honest enough to answer: "Yes, it's I. What I meant was: Will I be the *only* one to benefit by it? Really, when all is said and done, in the case of such a man as I am, isn't it by furthering one's personal interests that one most effectively furthers the interests of the community?"

The car was crossing the Seine. The river, the long vista of bridges, and the banks were bathed in rosy mist. He tossed the butt of his cigarette through the window and lit another.

"You're far more like me than you think, my little noodle of a brother!" he chuckled to himself complacently. "You were born a bourgeois, my boy, just as you were born with red hair. Your hair has darkened but the reddish glint's still there; you can't get rid of it. It's the same with your precious 'revolutionary instincts.' I haven't much faith in them. Atavism, upbringing, the natural bent of your mind—all pull you in the opposite direction. Just wait; very likely when you're forty you'll be more of a 'damned bourgeois' than I am!"

The car was slowing down; Victor leaned out, trying to read the numbers on the houses. He drew up finally in front of a barred gate.

"Still, for all his faults, I'm very fond of Jacques," Antoine murmured to himself as he opened the door. And now he reproached himself for not having given his brother a heartier welcome and shown more pleasure at seeing him again.

# Chapter XXIII

FOR the past year, Pastor Gregory had been living in a squalid boarding-house at the far end of a block of tenement-houses whose occupants were mostly Armenian workmen. The pastor was carrying on a mission among them.

Antoine had the greatest difficulty in waking the night-watchman, an unkempt Levantine who was snoring fully dressed on a bench in the hall.

"Yes, sir. Master wanting Pastor Gregory? I knowing him, sir. Please to kindly step upstairs."

The worthy missioner occupied an attic on the top floor of the overcrowded hovel. The sweltering heat of a July night was churning up a mingled stench of garbage-pails and grease, which brought to mind the rancid smells of an Arab back-street.

At the night-watchman's timid rap on his door, Gregory could be heard scrambling out of bed at once. "The 'sleep of the just,' " Antoine smiled to himself, "is obviously a light one."

The latch slid back and the pastor appeared, holding a small, smoky oil-lamp.

He cut an amazing figure, clad in an immensely long night-shirt that decorously concealed even his ankles. As he was unable to sleep without constant pressure on his liver, he had tightly swathed his waist in a girdle of brown flannel, the effect of which was to make the upper part of the night-shirt bulge like a woman's blouse, while the lower half bellied out like a skirt. With his bare feet, skinny arms, lank locks, and spectral pallor, he brought to mind a wizard out of the *Arabian Nights*.

He did not recognize Antoine at first, but no sooner had the latter spoken a few words than he understood everything. Without answering or wasting a moment while Antoine, standing in the doorway, went on with his explanation, he had fixed the end of his girdle to the iron bedpost and, to unwind the numerous layers of flannel, had begun whirling himself round, like a dancing dervish, faster and faster.

Antoine, who had difficulty in keeping a sober face, was now describing the operation and the difficulty of extracting the bullet.

"Ah! Ah!" the dervish panted derisively. "Forget about the revolver. Let that bullet be. What we've got to stimulate is the—the life-urge."

Waving his arms, he flashed resentful glances at the visitor. When the unpeeling process was complete, he moved forward and brought close to Antoine's eyes his angular, misshapen face, with the perpetually twitching brows. Then he chuckled to himself soundlessly.

"Poor dear doctor, my bearded enemy of yore!" he exclaimed in a tone of heart-felt pity. "You think to cure diseases, but it's you and your blaspheming fraternity who cause disease—by proclaiming it exists. Nonsense! I say to you: Let the Light enter in. Christ is the only healer. Who raised Lazarus from the dead? Could you do as much, poor, benighted doctor?"

Antoine, waiting at the door, made no reply.

"Man is divine," Gregory announced in a gruff voice. He had backed against the wall and was stooping to put on his shoes. "Jesus knew in His heart He was divine. And I'm divine. And so are we all." He worked his feet into the heavy black shoes which he had left laced. "But He who said: 'The letter killeth' was killed by the law. Christ was killed by the law. Man has borne in mind only the letter of the law. There's not one church in existence that is truly founded on the spirit of Christ's teachings. All the churches are founded solely on the letter of His gospel."

Without the least break in his flow of words, he was bustling about the room with the slapdash, blundering alacrity typical of neurasthenics.

"God is All in All. He is the supreme source of light and warmth." With a vindictive tug he whipped his trousers off the window-hasp. Each movement of his had the startling suddenness of an electric flash. "God is All," he repeated, in a louder tone, for he had turned toward the wall to button his fly.

When that was done, he spun round on his heel and shot Antoine a look of dark defiance. "God is All, and there is no place for evil in Him." His voice was stern. "I tell you, my poor dear doctor, there's not one atom of evil or ill-will in the universal All."

He slipped into his black alpaca coat, put on a grotesque little felt hat, and in a surprisingly hearty tone—as if the sensation of being dressed had raised his spirits—ejaculated: "Glory be to God!" rolling his eyes toward the ceiling and touching his hat politely.

Then, lowering his gaze, he stared at Antoine with a far-away expression and murmured: "Poor Thérèse! Poor dear lady!" Tears glistened in his eyes. It was as if only now his thoughts had turned to the tragedy that had brought Antoine to his door. "And poor dear Jerome!" he sighed. "Poor sluggish heart, was life too much for you? Could you not put away from you the Negative? … May our Christ Jesus give him the strength to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light! I am coming to you, poor sinner. I'm on my way to you." He went up to Antoine. "Let's start," he said. "Bring me to him."

Before blowing out the lamp, he took a taper from the tail-pocket of his coat and lit it. Then he opened the door.

"Go ahead!"

Antoine obeyed. Stretching forth his arm, Gregory held the taper aloft to light the steps.

"Christ said men should not put their candle under a bushel but on a candlestick, for it to give light unto all. It is Christ who lights a candle in our hearts. Poor little candle, how often it burns low and wavers and gives off a noisome smoke! Alas for us! Let us pray Him that our light may burn with a bright, steady flame, so that it may drive back the world of matter into the outer darkness."

While, clinging to the banisters, Antoine made his way down the narrow staircase the pastor went on murmuring phrases that sounded like an exorcism. The words grew less and less intelligible, but Antoine noticed that "matter" and "darkness" kept on recurring, always on a note of rancour.

As they came out into the courtyard Antoine said: "I've my car here. You can go in it to the hospital, and I'll join you there in an hour or so."

Gregory offered no objection, but before getting into the car he flashed at the younger man a look that was so keen and seemed so understanding that Antoine felt a flush rising to his cheeks. "Still," he reflected, "he can't possibly know where I'm going."

With a sense of vast relief he watched the car recede into the greyness of the dawn.

A light, cool breeze met him at the street-corner; evidently it had been raining somewhere near by. Cheerful as a schoolboy who has just escaped from a long detention, Antoine almost ran to the nearest main thoroughfare and hailed a taxi.

"To the Avenue de Wagram."

He had the driver stop fifty yards from the house, jumped briskly out, ran up the side-street, and opened the door quietly.

No sooner had he entered than his face lit up. That was Anne's perfume—a heavy, cloying scent, with a tang more of resin than of flowers, that crept into the throat and set the senses tingling. It was less an aroma than something to be tasted—and Antoine relished it.

"Heady perfumes seem to be in my line." Antoine smiled to himself, remembering with a thrill the ambergris necklace that Rachel wore.

Stealthily he crept into the bathroom, which the dawn was flooding with cool, pale light. He undressed quickly and, standing in the bath, squeezed out a large sponge over his shoulders. As the water trickled down his back it seemed to evaporate in his body's warmth, like water steaming off heated metal, and he had an exquisite sensation of his fatigue flowing away under its cool caress. Bringing his mouth down to the tap, he drank deeply of the ice-cold water. Then softly as a cat he tiptoed into the bedroom.

A little yawn, a faint, dulcet sound rising from the carpet, reminded him of Laddie's presence. He felt a small cold muzzle, a silken ear tickling his ankles.

The curtains were drawn. The bedside lamp shed a soft dawnlike sheen, tinged with the roseate glow that Antoine had admired an hour before, when crossing the Seine. Anne lay asleep in the big bed, her face turned to the wall, her head nestling in the crook of her bare arm. Fashion papers were strewn on the floor, and in the ashtray on the table was a little pyramid of half-burnt cigarettes.

Standing at the bedside, Antoine gazed down at the dark luxuriance of her hair, her slim neck and shoulders, and the graceful outline of her limbs under the counterpane. "For once so helpless!" he mused. Seldom did Anne rouse in him any such tenderly protective feelings; as a rule he merely reacted with a sort of sporting zest to the passionate, insatiable desire she lavished on him. Smiling, he dallied with the pleasure of voluptuous suspense, postponing the thrill he knew was waiting for him there, close at hand—a thrill of which neither Jacques nor Jerome, nor Gregory, nor anyone in the wide world could now deprive him. But then the desire to plunge his face into the scented darkness of her hair, to strain to his breast that warm, supple form and weld their bodies into one, grew so imperious that the smile died on his lips. Warily, holding his breath, he untucked a corner of the bed and with a strong, sinuous movement, wriggled in beside her. She gave a hoarse, quickly stifled cry, swung herself round toward him, and passed from sleep to waking in his arms.

# Chapter XXIV

Jacques woke early, with an impression of being in good fettle for the day. “There’s no time to lose,” he murmured as he sprang out of bed, “if I’m to catch the five p.m. train.”

But hardly was he on his feet when he grew aware of something weighing on his mind; he still was haunted by the events of the night before.

He dressed rapidly and went down to telephone to Antoine.

Fontanin was not dead; the coma might last another twenty-four hours or even longer. There was no hope of saving him.

Jacques informed his brother that they would not be seeing each other again, as he was returning to Switzerland that day. After paying the hotel bill, he went to the Gare de l’Est and left his valise at the parcel-room.

Throughout the day he hurried from one place to another, calling on certain “men in the know,” whose addresses Richardley had given him. There were six or seven such visits to be made.

A vast movement was on foot in all the leftwing groups to scotch the war-menace. It seemed that the union of the various parties had at last been definitely achieved. On this point the latest news was more than reassuring.

And yet he could not shake off his feeling of apprehension; no sooner was he alone than stealthily its shadow fell across his mood, darkening it with an inexplicable premonition of futility. Feverishly, bathed in perspiration, he rushed to and fro across Paris, constantly changing his mind and his direction, cutting conversations short, hastily abandoning at the last moment an interview to have which he had spent a half-hour on the way. Streets, houses, the passers-by, even his comrades, all had a hostile air, unlike their normal selves. On all sides he seemed to be fretting against iron bars that hemmed him in like a caged beast. At certain moments, indeed, a feeling of actual physical sickness swept over him; his hands went clammy, his chest seemed gripped in a vice, his head was swimming, and an uprush of unformulated terror made him gasp for breath.

“What on earth can be wrong with me?” he wondered.

Still, by four he had got through his most urgent tasks and was free to leave. He was all eagerness to be back in Geneva and, at the same time, inexplicably dreaded quitting Paris.

Suddenly he thought: “Why not wait till the night train? I’d have time to drop in at the Croissant, the *Humanité* and the *Progrès* offices, and I might attend the meeting in the Avenue de Clichy and pick up some news of how things are going in the arsenals.”

He had learned there was to be a gathering at one of the cafés in the Avenue de Clichy; it had been organized by the Maritime Workers’ Union. There he would be sure to meet the strike leaders detailed to proceed to seaports on the west coast, where strikes were being fomented. He would do well to glean some information on these projects.

But another thought had been preying on his mind all day, the thought that Daniel was now in Paris. Obviously he could go back without getting in touch with him. But Daniel would be sure to learn about his presence here. “If only I could have met him,” Jacques thought, “without going to the hospital!” Abruptly he made up his mind. “I’ll wait for the night express. If I go to Neuilly after dinner I’ll see Daniel, and there won’t be much risk of my meeting *her*.”

In pursuance of his plan he left the *Progrès* office at half-past eight. He had looked in there on the off chance, after the Maritime Workers’ Union meeting, and had had the luck of running into Burot, a subeditor commissioned to collect for the *Humanité* all the news relating to the arsenals in Western France.

He heartened himself to face the trip to Neuilly, with the consoling thought: “Anyhow, tomorrow I shall be in Geneva.”

He was going down the narrow spiral staircase leading from the mezzanine to the ground-floor Café when a friendly hand clapped his shoulder.

“Eh, boy, so you’re in Paris!”

Even in the semi-darkness there was no mistaking Mourlan, with his deep voice and broad accent. He wore his hair extravagantly long and had the look of an aged, swarthy Christ; the loose blouse worn by French compositors was his invariable garb, winter and summer through.

In the heroic days of the Dreyfus case, Mourlan had launched a subversive news-bulletin, reproduced by mimeograph and circulated weekly among a select few. Thereafter his *Etendard* had settled into a revolutionary little news-sheet which Mourlan continued to edit with the help of unpaid collaborators. Now and then Jacques sent him a news-story or the translation of an article in the foreign press. His publications had a tone of logical intransigence which appealed to Jacques. From the viewpoint of an uncompromising Socialist Mourlan attacked the Party officials and especially the Jaurés group, the “opportunists” as he called them.

He had taken a fancy to Jacques. He liked the “young ‘uns” for their keenness and intractability. Though poorly educated, he had a nimble wit, paradoxical and garrulous, and his accent, that of the old-time Paris workingman, gave raciness to his humour. For years he had been struggling almost single-handed to keep his newspaper afloat. He was feared. Solidly entrenched in his orthodoxy, fortified by the life of militant poverty he led, and wholeheartedly devoted to the revolutionary cause, he harried without pity the politicians of the Party, denounced their slightest errors, showed up their compromises—and his blows always struck home. The men he trounced avenged themselves by spreading damaging rumours concerning him. He had once owned a bookshop in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, specializing in Socialist literature, but his enemies averred that the bulk of his trade was done in pornographic books, as indeed was not impossible. His private life, moreover, did not inspire confidence. The little offices of the austere *Etendard* in the Rue de la Roquette were frequented by women of the easiest virtue, hailing from the dives in the Rue de Lappe. The ladies paying these neighbourly visits brought him sweets, for which he had a weakness. They talked in shrill voices, wrangled, and sometimes came to blows. Then the worthy Apostle would rise and, laying down his pipe, seize the belligerents each by an arm, and throw them down the stairs; after which he resumed the conversation at the point where he had dropped it.

He seemed in a gloomy mood as he accompanied Jacques to the street.

“Not a sou in the till!” He pointed the remark by turning out both pockets of his black blouse simultaneously. “If a spot of cash don’t come my way before next Thursday, the next number of *Etendard’s* up the flue!”

"That surprises me," Jacques said. "I noticed that your circulation was going up."

"I should say so! There's new subscribers coming in all the time. Trouble is they don't pay. If it was a money-making concern, o' course I wouldn't hesitate; I'd stop sending out their copies. But what do I run it for, boy? For propaganda. Well, then, what's to be done? Cut down expenses? I do everything myself. To start with, I allowed myself a hundred francs a month out of the takings. But I couldn't bring myself to draw 'em more than once. I live on bread and cheese, like an ordinary tramp. I'm up to the eyes in debt. And it's been like that these eighteen years! … But let's talk o' something more important. What do they think in Switzerland about these ugly rumours buzzing around? Personally, I'm an old hand, I ain't surprised at nothing. I seen too many things in my days. That business in '83, for instance. I was only twenty then, but I used to trot round every evening to the offices of the *Révolte*. That name don't mean anything to you, I opine. Likely you wouldn't even know that in '83, those four fine old fly-by-nights—England, Germany, Austria, and Rumania—were on the brink of launching a slap-up European war against Russia, taking advantage of France's isolation, of course. And damn near brought it off, my boy! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! Nothing's changed. It's always the same old game. Patriotism, the national honour—they blithered about it then, as they're doing now. But what lay underneath? Commercial jealousy, tariff problems, the usual big business combines.

"No, nothing's changed, except one thing. We've no Kropotkin nowadays. In '83 Kropotkin worked like a demon, fighting the gang who had the European press in their pay: Anzin, Krupp, Armstrong, and the rest of them. He gave them one hell of a trouncing, did old Kropotkin. I've dug up his articles, and I'm republishing three in my next issue. You must read them, boy; there's useful stuff in 'em for all you lads to browse on."

The veteran pacifist-in-arms was grinning broadly; his eyes were twinkling. He had quite forgotten that a hundred and eighty francs, of which he had not the first centime, were needed before he could get that "next number" out.

Jacques took his leave. "I must get the *Etendard* included in our antiwar campaign list," he was thinking. He resolved to speak about it at Geneva and, if possible, have a subsidy remitted to Mourlan.

He had not dined and, before taking the Metro for Neuilly at the Bourse station, dropped in for a sandwich at the Café du Croissant. Several of the *Humanité* staff, following the editor's lead, patronized this Café-restaurant at the corner of the Rue Montmartre.

Jaurés was seated in his usual corner near the window, dining with three friends. As he passed the table, Jacques waved a friendly greeting, but the Skipper, who was bending over his plate, failed to notice him. His shoulders hunched, his neck hidden by his beard, he let the others chatter away, while with thoughtless gluttony he dispatched a plateful of mutton and beans. The big brief-case, bulging with dossiers, that he carried with him everywhere, lorded it, within arm's reach, on the other side of the table. On top of the brief-case lay a pile of newspapers and pamphlets and a large paper-bound book.

Jacques, who knew that Jaurés was an indefatigable reader, recalled an anecdote which Stefany (who had heard it from Marius Moutet) had retailed to him two days before. When recently travelling with Jaurés, Moutet had been amazed one day to see him poring over—of all things—a Russian grammar. In answer to his question Jaurés had said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "Of course I'm learning Russian, and all of you should hurry up and do the same. Quite likely Russia's on the eve of playing a most important part in European affairs."

Sitting with his back to the light, Jacques watched the famous man at table, and wondered if he were paying the least attention to what the others said. That was a question he had put himself on several occasions when he had come in contact with Jaurés. Whenever he chanced not to be speaking, he seemed lost in a ruminative silence, listening to a secret music murmuring within his mind.

Suddenly Jacques saw him raise his head, pass his napkin quickly across his lips, puff out his chest, and begin speaking. Under the lowering brows his keen, restless eyes flashed glances round the room. Set back in the swarthy beard, the open mouth with the drooping corners brought to mind the horn of a loudspeaker, or, at certain angles, the black mouthpiece of a tragic mask. He gave the impression not so much of addressing any one of those around him as of thinking aloud, breaking a lance with an invisible opponent. In his mental make-up thought and controversy were so intimately allied that only in discussion did his mind work at full pressure. It was hard to catch the words, for Jaurés was speaking in a low tone—as low, that is to say, as his vocal organs, trained to public speaking and richly sonorous, permitted him. Nevertheless, across the hubbub of many voices in the Café, Jacques distinguished unmistakably the very personal timbre of Jaurés's voice, with its low, throbbing accents like the drone of a muted orchestra accompanying the soaring phrases of the vocalist. And that familiar undertone evoked a host of memories in his mind: the hectic atmosphere of public meetings, the clash of partisans, dramatic perorations, storms of applause from frenzied crowds.

Carried away by his subject, Jaurés had thrust aside his half-full plate and was leaning forward over the table, with lowered brows, like a bull ready to charge. Beating the rhythm of his phrases, his clenched fists rose and fell upon the table edge, not violently but with the stolid cadence of a steam-hammer. And when, pressed for time, Jacques left the Café, Jaurés was still declaiming, thumping the marble with his fists.

This heartening glimpse of the great orator had quickened his energy, and Jacques was still under its tonic influence when he reached the entrance-gates of a large building in the Boulevard Bineau. "Baudrand Hospital"; that was the place.

It was quite dark, but Jacques crossed the garden without slackening pace; he could not bring himself to look up at the lighted windows.

The old woman who opened the door for him informed him in a quavering voice that the poor gentleman was still alive and his son had arrived late in the afternoon. Jacques asked her to go and fetch Daniel. But the doorkeeper had no helper and could not leave her post.

"The ward nurse will go and tell him," she said. "You've only to go up to the second floor, sir."

After a brief hesitation Jacques complied.

On the first-floor landing he look round, but saw no one; the long corridor, bathed in a soft, pale glow, was silent as the grave. The second floor was equally silent and along the endless white-walled corridor no one was in view. There was nothing for it but to hunt for the ward nurse. After waiting some minutes, he began walking down the corridor. His feeling of apprehension had given way to a vague curiosity, which encouraged him to take risks.

He had not observed a shadowy form seated in a window bay. As he came up, the girl turned and rose abruptly. Jenny!

It was almost as if he had foreseen this meeting, for he felt no real surprise as he murmured to himself: "Well, it's happened!" And at once he noticed that she was bareheaded … as in the past.

The girl's first gesture had been to push back her hair, which she realized was in disorder, and under the subdued light, the soft pallor of her forehead gave an impression of inviolable purity, if not of gentleness.

For two seconds they faced each other, with wildly beating hearts. At last he managed to speak, in a voice roughened by emotion.

"Please excuse me… . The doorkeeper said …"

He was struck by her pallor, bloodless lips, peaked nostrils. Her eyes were tense but expressionless; all that he read in them was a firm resolve not to quail, not to avert her gaze.

"I came to inquire …"

Jenny made a vague gesture implying that all hope was lost.

"… and to see Daniel," he added.

With an effort, as if she were swallowing a pill, she muttered some indistinct words, then made a hasty move along the corridor toward the sitting-room. Jacques began to follow her, but stopped half-way. She opened the door. He thought she was going to call Daniel. But holding the door open, she remained there, half turned toward him, with a harsh expression on her face and her eyes fixed on the floor.

"I'd rather not …" Jacques began, moving toward her. "I mean, I don't want to disturb …"

She made no reply, did not raise her eyes. She seemed to be waiting, with suppressed impatience, for him to enter. Once he had crossed the threshold, she let the door swing to behind him.

Mme. de Fontanin was sitting on the sofa at the far end of the room, with a young man in uniform beside her. A helmet and service belt lay on the floor near him.

"You!"

Daniel had risen to his feet, his eyes aglow with joy and wonder. Unmoving, he was staring at the new Jacques before him, the young man with the sturdy shoulders and resolute chin, so little like his boyhood friend. And Jacques, too, stood for a moment motionless, his eyes held by the tall young N.C.O., with bronzed cheeks and close-cropped hair, who at last began to move toward him stiffly, with an unexpected jingle of spurred boots… .

Daniel had taken his friend by the arm and was steering him toward his mother. Without betraying the least vexation or surprise, Mme. de Fontanin raised her weary eyes to Jacques, holding out her hand, and in a voice as listless as her gaze she said quietly, as though it were only a day since they last had met: "How do you do, Jacques?"

With that easy, slightly punctilious grace he had inherited from his father, Daniel bent toward Mme. de Fontanin. "If you'll excuse me, Mother dear, I'll go downstairs with Jacques for a moment. Sure you don't mind?"

A tremor passed through Jacques's body. He had recognized his Daniel, the Daniel of his youth, in his intonation, in the small, faintly embarrassed smile that screwed up the left corner of his lips, in the tender, respectful way he had of pronouncing "Mother dear," separating the syllables of the word "Mother."

Mme. de Fontanin nodded gently, casting an affectionate glance on the two young men. "Of course, my dear, go with your friend. There's nothing I need you for just now."

"Let's go to the garden," Daniel suggested, his hand still resting on Jacques's shoulder.

Quite unconsciously he had reverted to that habit of his boyhood, which their difference in stature still justified as much as ever. Daniel had always been taller than Jacques, and his uniform brought out his height. The slimness of his figure above the waist, in the dark, close-fitting tunic with the white collar, contrasted with the baggy red breeches and thick leggings that gave his limbs a disproportionate bulk. His hobnailed soles clanged on the tiled floor of the corridor, and the loud, martial footfalls seemed an outrage on the sleepbound silence of the building. Uncomfortably aware of this, he refrained from speech as he walked toward the stairs, leaning on his friend to keep himself from slipping.

Jacques asked himself: "What about Jenny?" and once more he felt a sudden contraction of his throat that was like a spasm of fear. He kept his head high and his eyes fixed on the floor as he walked. When they came to the stairs, involuntarily he looked back and cast a questing glance along the empty corridor; a feeling of disappointment, touched with rancour, stole over him.

Daniel halted at the first step.

"So you're staying in Paris?" The cheerful tone struck a contrast with the sadness of his look.

Jacques thought: "That means Jenny hasn't mentioned me to him."

"I should have left already," he answered briskly. "I'm taking a train back tonight." Daniel looked so crestfallen that Jacques made haste to add: "As a matter of fact I stayed on just to see you. I've got to be at Geneva tomorrow."

Daniel gazed at him pensively; his eyes were full of silent interrogation. Why must Jacques be at Geneva? The mystery surrounding Jacques's life irritated him, but, intimidated by his friend's reserve, he dared not question him as yet. Without speaking, he took his hand from Jacques's shoulder, grasped the banister, and began walking downstairs. All his joy had left him now. What was the use of this unlooked-for visit, which had kindled his desire for an exchange of confidences, if Jacques was going away and would be lost to him once more?

The garden, which had just been watered, was empty and softly sparkling under the glow of lamps dotted among the trees.

"Have a smoke?" Daniel suggested.

Taking his cigarette-case from his pocket, he eagerly lit a cigarette. For a moment the match-flame illumined his features. Their most striking change was that an open-air life in the Vosges had tanned his pale skin, which in the past had so noticeably contrasted with his dark eyes and hair and the slender line of his moustache.

Side by side, in silence, they turned into a winding path at the end of which stood a ring of white garden seats.

"Shall we sit here?" Daniel asked and, without waiting for an answer, dropped heavily into a chair. "I'm worn out. It was a perfectly frightful trip." For some moments he could not shake off the memory of the day he had gone through in a jolting, stuffy railway-car, smoking cigarette after cigarette, his eyes fixed on the landscape scudding past and his mind trapped in a maze of conflicting—but all equally lugubrious—theories as to his father's "accident," while unforeseeable events were taking place in far-off Paris. "Frightful!"

he repeated. Then pointing with the red tip of his cigarette toward the window behind which his father lay dying, he added in a sombre voice: “It was bound to end that way, sooner or later.”

The clean, cool odour of freshly watered soil was rising from the flower-beds through the darkness, and now and then, soft as a warm breath, the night wind wafted to them a bitter-sweet aroma, like that of some pungent medicine, which came not from the dispensary but from a little Japanese varnish tree in a remote corner of the grounds.

Seeing Daniel in uniform beside him had revived Jacques’s haunting premonition of a coming war. “Did you have any trouble getting leave?” he asked.

“Not the slightest. Why?” When Jacques said nothing, he continued tranquilly: “They’ve given me four days, with the possibility of an extension. But that won’t be needed. Your brother, who was here when I arrived, told me quite frankly there isn’t any hope.”

He fell silent, then went on abruptly: “And it’s best so.” Again he pointed toward the building. “It’s a horrible thing to say, but, considering how things are, none of us dare hope that he will live.” His voice grew harsh. “Of course I know his death won’t mend matters, but anyhow it cuts short an episode in my father’s life that would have had dreadful consequences for Mother”, for him, for all of us.” He turned slightly toward Jacques. “There was a warrant out for his arrest,” he added with a break in his voice, a rageful, rasping sob. Closing his eyes, Daniel leaned back in his chair. For a moment the gleam of a lamp lit up his handsome forehead, the upper line of which formed two white half-moons parted by a promontory of dark hair.

Jacques would have liked to put in some consoling word, but his lonely life and political associations had unfitted him for expansiveness. Still, he drew nearer Daniel and touched his arm. Under his palm he felt the rough texture of the tunic. A curious odour of wool, dubbing, and warm leather came from Daniel and, when he moved, mingled with the fragrance of the night-bound garden.

Four years had elapsed since Jacques had last met his friend.

Despite the letters that had passed between them after M. Thibault’s death, and despite Daniel’s repeated invitations, he had never brought himself to make the trip to Lunéville. He dreaded meeting Daniel face to face; in affectionate, if infrequent, correspondence it seemed to him their friendship, such as it now was, could best fulfill itself. There could be no question of its persistence and vitality; indeed, the only real attachments Jacques had ever known were for Daniel and Antoine. But it was a heritage from the past, that past from which Jacques had deliberately cut adrift and of which he hated to be reminded.

“Aren’t they talking about war, at Lunéville?” he asked, to break the silence.

Daniel betrayed no particular surprise. “About war? Of course. The officers are always gassing about it. It’s their kind of shop-talk, of course. Why shouldn’t they?” He smiled. “Personally, I add up the days. Seventy-three, no, seventy-two today, seventy-one tomorrow. That’s all that matters. By the end of September I’ll be through with it.”

Just then another ray of light was playing on his head. No, Daniel had not changed much. In the flawless oval of his face, to which the perfect regularity of the features added a certain gravity (especially noticeable at times like this when grief and weariness had overcast them), his smile had still its radiance of the past—that slow, far-away smile which drew his upper lip askew, discovering a white gleam of teeth. A shy though somehow brazen smile. In the old days, as a boy, Jacques had never been able to help watching, with a peculiar thrill, for that irritating yet so captivating smile; and now again he felt a surge of warm emotion. But all he said was: “I suppose you find your life in barracks pretty awful.”

“Oh, no! Not so bad as all that.”

Their feeble attempts at conversation plumped into the silence like mooring-cables, flung from one ship to another, which splash a dozen times into the water before being caught and hauled aboard.

After a longish pause Daniel spoke again. “No, it’s not too bad. At first, yes; the fatigues—latrine, stable-litter, and all the rest of ‘em—were foul. But now I’m an N.C.O., it’s better. I’ve made some quite decent friends among the men—not to mention the horses! When all’s said and done, I don’t regret the experience.”

Jacques stared at him fixedly, and with such aloofness, such disdain, that Daniel was at the brink of flaring up. Jacques’s stubbornness, his silences, even his questions, implied a sort of distant superiority that galled Daniel bitterly. Now, however, affection got the better of his anger. “The real barrier,” he thought, “between myself and Jacques isn’t the superficial clash of our personalities, which can easily be explained by the long break in our intimacy. No, it’s my complete ignorance of so many things; a whole slice of his life is a sealed book to me. Yes, I’ve got to win his confidence… .”

He leaned forward suddenly and in a different tone, tenderly persuasive, that seemed to solicit all the affection Jacques could muster up, he murmured: “Jacques!”

Probably he hoped that would be enough to evoke a swift response, a heart-felt word, or at least a gesture of encouragement. But instinctively Jacques had shrunk away, as if determined to hold aloof.

Daniel decided to risk all in a direct question. “But do explain! What was it happened four years ago?”

“You know quite well.”

“No; I don’t. I’ve never understood. Why did you go away? Surely you might have trusted me with your secret, and let me know that you were going? And why leave me all those years without news of you?”

Jacques’s head was sunk between his shoulders, and he was gazing sullenly at Daniel. He made a gesture of discouragement.

“Oh, what’s the use of digging all that up again?”

Daniel placed his hand on Jacques’s wrist. “Jacques!” he said.

“No!”

“Why? Is it really ‘No’? Am I never, never to know what prompted you to do a thing like that?”

“Oh, stop!” Jacques freed his wrist impatiently.

Daniel said nothing and slowly drew himself erect.

“Some day … later on,” Jacques muttered with an apathy that seemed invincible and rendered all the more unexpected the sudden shrillness of his voice as he burst out ragefully: “ ‘A thing like that’! Really, one’d think that I’d committed a crime.” Without a pause he went on speaking. “For one thing, is there really all that need for ‘explanations’? Does it seem to you so perfectly incomprehensible that one fine day a man should want to break with everything? To escape, with no companion but himself? Do you mean to say you can’t understand that? That one shouldn’t indefinitely put up with being muzzled, mutilated? That, for once in a lifetime, a man should

dare to be his very self? Should have the courage to dig down into the depths of his being, and unearth that part of him which has always been the least appreciated, the most scorned, and dare to say: 'This is my truest self'? To shout to all the world: 'I can do without you!' No? Do you mean to say you can't understand that?"

"Indeed, I do understand," Daniel murmured. "I understand quite well."

At first he had yielded unthinkingly to a subtle delectation, the thrill of listening to that masterful, high-strung, overemotional voice which made him feel he had regained the Jacques of former days. But after a while he had become convinced that there was something insincere in this tirade; Jacques's outburst had been above all an evasion of the issue. And then he grew aware that never would Jacques broach the frank explanation that would clear things up between them. He must abandon hope of ever knowing the truth. Worse still, he must resign himself to losing that unique friendship of which he had been so proud. And with the vivid intuition of his loss, he felt a pang of grief. Another added to the many griefs assailing him that night… .

For some minutes they remained thus facing each other, without moving, without exchanging a word, even a glance. At last Daniel drew in his legs—he had kept them stretched out full length till now—and passed his hand over his forehead.

"Well, I'm afraid I must be going back there now." All the singing tone had left his voice.

"Yes." Jacques stood up at once. "I've got to be going, too."

Daniel, too, rose from his seat.

"Thanks for coming."

"Please ask your mother to forgive me for keeping you so long."

Each waited for the other to make the first move.

"What time's your train?" Daniel asked.

"Eleven-fifty."

"From the Gare de Lyon?"

"Yes."

"You'll take a taxi, I suppose?"

"Don't need it. There's a tram that goes there."

They fell silent, ashamed to hear themselves saying such things to each other.

"I'll come with you as far as the gate," Daniel said as they entered the drive.

They crossed the garden without exchanging another word.

As they reached the street a car stopped beside the entrance. A hatless young woman and an elderly man jumped out of it. Their faces expressed consternation. They hurried past the two young men, who followed them for a moment with their eyes—less out of curiosity than of compunction.

To cut short the leave-taking, Jacques held out his hand. Daniel gripped it without speaking. For an instant they gazed silently at each other. On Daniel's lips hovered a dim smile, which Jacques was almost too weary to reciprocate. But he walked through the gateway briskly enough, and crossed the wide, brightly lit sidewalk. Before starting across the street he looked back. Daniel had not moved. Jacques saw him wave his hand, then swing round and vanish among the shadows of the trees.

In the distance, across the leafage, shone a row of lighted windows … Jenny.

Then, without waiting for his tram, Jacques started off in the direction of Paris—of his train, of Geneva—almost at a run, as if death were at his heels.

# PART B

## Chapter I

IN THE large reception-room with the lacquer screens Mme. de Battaincourt sat waiting. (Antoine had forbidden Léon once for all to show any caller into his private study.) The windows were open. The July day was drawing to a sultry close. With a lithe movement of her shoulders Anne let fall her light evening wrap onto the back of the chair.

"The nasty man likes making us wait, doesn't he, Laddie?" she sighed.

The Pekinese, a small sandy blur of silken fluff lazily curled up on the carpet, feebly pricked his ears. Anne had bought him as far back as the 1900 Exhibition and, for all his decrepitude and surliness, she still persisted in taking the grotesque little creature with her everywhere she went.

Of a sudden Laddie raised his head; his mistress followed suit. Both had recognized Antoine's rapid stride and his brisk way of opening and closing doors.

When he entered he was wearing the preoccupied look of the busy doctor. His lips lightly brushed Anne's hair, then slipped down to her nape, making her shudder deliriously. Raising both arms, she slowly passed her fingers over the high-domed, handsome forehead, the firm line of his eyebrows, then softly stroked his cheeks. For a moment she cupped with her hands his under-jaw, the sturdy Thibault chin that she loved and feared at the same time. At last she looked up and rose to her feet, smiling to him.

"Do *look* at me, Tony! Yes, your eyes are on me, but that doesn't mean you see me. I hate that high-and-mighty air."

He took her by the shoulders and held her in front of him, pressing his fingers on her shoulder-blades. Then, still holding her, he moved back a little and swept her body with a possessive gaze from head to foot. What had most of all drawn him to Anne was not so much the beauty that still was hers as that she was so obviously a woman made for love.

She yielded herself to his scrutiny, gazing at him with eyes aglow with pleasure and vitality.

"I'll make a quick change, and be with you in a jiffy," he said, pressing her gently back into the chair.

Nowadays he dressed for dinner so often that five or ten minutes were enough for the entire ritual—shave, shower, getting into a stiff shirt, white waistcoat, and the rest of it. All had been laid out in readiness, and Léon handed the garments to him one by one, with downcast eyes and naively priestlike gestures.

"My straw hat and motoring gloves," he murmured.

Before leaving the room he cast a quick, comprehensive glance at the mirror and pulled down his cuffs. It was only quite recently that he had learned not to disdain the little increment of comfort and content which comes from fine linen, a crisp collar, well-tailored clothes. He had come to regard the relaxation of a rather extravagant "night out" as no more than his due after a hard day's work, and, indeed, a good thing for his health; and he liked to have Anne share it with him—though he was quite capable on occasion of enjoying himself alone.

"Where are you taking me to dine tonight?" Anne asked as Antoine slipped her cloak around her shoulders after lightly kissing her bare neck. "It's much too stuffy in Paris," she continued. "What about going to Prat's, at Marly? Or how about the Coq? It's more cheerful, isn't it?"

"Rather far out, don't you think?"

"That doesn't matter. And, anyhow, the road beyond Versailles has just been repaired."

She had a way of her own of murmuring: "Shall we go there?" or "What do you say to this?" with a little dying fall in her voice and a languid, appealing look in her eyes. Light-heartedly she would propose the most fantastic expeditions without a thought for the distance or the lateness of the hour, for Antoine's possible fatigue or preferences—still less for the cost her caprices might involve.

"Right! We'll make it the Coq," Antoine cheerfully assented. "Up with you, Laddie!" Stooping, he picked up the little dog and opened the door for Anne.

She halted in the doorway; the night-blue cloak, ivory-white dress, and a black lacquer screen behind her composed a perfect setting for the soft, dusky lustre of her skin. Turning, she enveloped him with a fond, all-revealing look, whispering "My Tony" so quietly that it seemed the words were not for him.

"Let's be off!" he said.

"Yes, I suppose we must," she sighed, as if their choice of a restaurant thirty miles from Paris had been a weak concession to her despot's whim. And with her head high, with lithe, long steps, to a low rustle of silken flounces, she gaily crossed the threshold.

"When you start walking," Antoine murmured in her ear, "I always think of a splendid ship putting out to sea."

Though his car was powerful and pleasant to handle, Antoine had lost interest in driving. But he knew that Anne liked nothing better than such evening jaunts together, without the chauffeur.

The sun had set, but the heat was still oppressive. Crossing the Bois, Antoine took the smaller, unfrequented byways ribboning the forest. The windows of the car were open and warm breezes poured in, laden with woodland odours.

Anne was chattering away and, telling of her last stay at Berck, began talking about her husband—a thing she rarely did. "Just think, he didn't want me to leave. He was simply beastly about it; why, he even started threatening me. Still, he drove me to the station—looking like a martyr, though. When he was standing on the platform, just before the train went, what do you think he had the nerve to say to me? 'So you'll never change?' I looked down at him from the car window. 'No,' I said—and I said it pretty venomously, take my word for it! And it's quite true, I shall never change. I loathe him, and there's nothing to be done about it."

Antoine smiled. He rather enjoyed seeing her in a temper, and had told her once: "I like it when that murder light comes into your eye." And now a memory came back to him of de Battaincourt, her husband, the friend of Daniel and Jacques, with his deerlike nose and tow hair, his listless, mildly bored manner—rather a poisonous chap, in fact.

"And I once was really keen on that fool—imagine it!" Anne said. "Perhaps just for that reason."

"What reason?"

"Because he was so stupid. Because he'd had so few adventures. That struck mc then as quite refreshing, it was such a change. Like starting life all over again. Goodness, what silly things one does!"

She remembered her resolve to talk oftener about herself, her past life. Now or never was the moment. She settled herself comfortably on the seat, rested her head on Antoine's shoulder, and, gazing vaguely at the road in front, let memory take charge.

"I used to see him sometimes in Touraine, at meets. I'd often noticed him looking in my direction, but he never said a word to me. Then one evening when I was driving home through the woods, I saw him on the road—he was on foot. For some reason I was alone. I stopped the car and offered to give him a lift to Tours. He went crimson, and got in without saying anything. It was getting dark. Suddenly, just before we'd reached the toll-gate …"

Antoine listened with half an ear, his attention fixed on the road ahead, on the rhythm of the engine. "Yes," he mused, "Anne will love other men after me; will follow her appointed path." He had no illusions as to the impermanence of their liaison. "It's curious how I've always been drawn to women of that sort, strongly sexed women who've scrapped convention." He had sometimes wondered whether this passionate companionship which was all he wanted from his mistresses were not a rather imperfect form of love. The second-best, perhaps. Hadn't Studler said to him only the other day: "You confuse lust with love"? Well, imperfect or not, that form of love was his, and it suited him. For it made no inroads on his life as a hard-working man of science determined to let nothing in the world come between him and his vocation. In the course of that talk with Studler, the Caliph had quoted the words of a young writer named Peguy whom he knew: "To love is to declare the one you love is in the right, even when he or she is wrong." A hard saying, and Antoine had rebelled indignantly against it. Love of that kind, such all-consuming, infatuated, brain-destroying love, always inspired him with horror and amaze, even with a certain disgust… .

They had come to the bridge over the Seine, after crossing which the car took the steep Suresnes hill at an effortless thirty.

Suddenly Anne raised her right arm and pointed. "There's a little inn down there where they have wonderful fish and chips."

The inn in question was the one where Delorme had always used to take her. He was a former medical student who had opened a drug-store in the western suburbs and for several years, until the previous winter—until, that is, Anne had succeeded in breaking herself of the drug-habit—had recompensed the favours of this heavensent mistress by keeping her supplied with morphine. Fearing Antoine might put a question, she forced herself to laugh.

"It's worth visiting, if only to see the woman who runs it. A fat old dame with her hair always in curlers and her stockings concertinaing round her ankles. Personally, I'd rather go barelegged than have my stockings sag like that. Don't you agree?"

"We'll go there some Sunday," Antoine suggested.

"No, not a Sunday. You know how I loathe Sundays. Everywhere such beastly crowds of people—who call it their 'day of rest'!"

"Yes," Antoine said ironically. "It's a blessing, obviously, that six days out of seven everyone else is at work."

She did not catch the mockery in his tone and began laughing again.

" 'Curlers'! I love that word. It sounds so quaintly comic, doesn't it? I might call my next dog 'Curler.' … Only I'll never have another dog." Her voice grew earnest. "When Laddie's quite old I'll poison him. And I'll never replace him."

Antoine smiled and said without turning toward her: "What? You'd have the heart to poison Laddie?"

"Yes." Her tone was firm. "But only when he's quite, quite old and doddering."

Antoine gave her a quick, keen glance. He was aware of certain ugly rumours that had circulated after old Goupillot's death. Now and again they crossed his mind; usually he laughed them off. But there were times when Anne inspired him with something like horror, when he thought, as now: "She'd stick at nothing—even at poisoning a husband who'd grown 'quite, quite old and doddering'!"

"How'd you set about it?" he asked. "Strychnine? Cyanide?"

"No, I'd use one of the veronal group. Didial's the best. Only it's on the list; one has to have a prescription. We'll have to manage with common or garden dial. That do you, Laddie?"

Antoine's laugh was rather forced. "It's not so easy as all that, hitting the right dose. A gramme or two too little or too much, and you botch everything."

"A gramme or two? For a dog that doesn't weigh six pounds? You're clear off the mark, doctor." After working it out rapidly in her head she said calmly: "No, for Laddie twenty-five centigrammes of dial, twenty-eight at most, would do the trick."

She fell silent. He said nothing, either, but their thoughts were evidently following different roads, for presently she added in a low tone: "I'll never have another dog. Never. Does that surprise you?" She pressed herself against his shoulder once more. "Because you know, Tony, I'm quite capable of being loyal. Yes, really faithful."

The car slowed down for a sharp turn, followed by a grade crossing.

A vague smile hovered on Anne's lips; she was gazing at the road in front. "Really and truly, Tony dear, I was born to be a woman with one great love, one only in her life. It's not my fault if I've lived—as I have lived. And yet"—her voice grew emphatic—"there's one thing I can truly say: I've never lowered myself." She spoke in all sincerity; she had forgotten about Delorme. "And I regret nothing," she added after a pause.

For a while she kept silent, her forehead nestling on Antoine's shoulder, her eyes fixed on the shadowy depths of the forest and the dancing clouds of midges lit up by the headlights.

Then, "It's curious," she said. "The happier I am, the less I feel self-centred. There are times when I'd love, oh, how I'd love, to be able to dedicate my life to somebody, or something!"

He was amazed by the emotion in her voice; he knew she was sincere, that her social position and her wealth—the reward of fifteen years' methodical scheming—had brought her neither peace of mind nor happiness.

She sighed. "Next winter, you know, I've quite decided to start a new life—a life that's worth while, serves some purpose. And I want you to help me in it, Tony dear. Will you?"

This was a pet idea of hers, of which she often spoke to Antoine. And he, too, judged her not incapable of changing her way of living. With all her faults, she had sterling qualities: an alert, practical mind and an indomitable tenacity of purpose. But to persevere and to achieve her object, he well knew that she needed someone to play the guardian angel to her, and palliate her failings—someone like himself. He had been able to gauge his influence over her during the previous winter when he had made up his mind to break her of the drug-habit. He had persuaded her to undergo a two-month treatment at an institution near Paris; the treatment had been drastic and it had left her in a state of collapse, but definitely cured.

It was certain that, would he but take the pains to see it through, he could direct the store of latent energy in Anne to worthy ends. At a sign from him all her future might be transformed. But he was quite determined not to give that sign. Only too clearly he foresaw

all the new, time-devouring responsibilities that would be his, were he to play the rescuer's part. Every act commits its doer; most of all an act of generosity. And Antoine had the course of his own life to steer, his freedom to safeguard. On that point he was inflexible. Yet every time he thought of it he had an uneasy feeling—as if he were deliberately turning away so as not to see the hand of a drowning woman beckoning in a vain appeal… .

That night, as it so happened, the Coq d'Argent was almost empty.

When the car stopped, *maître d'hôtel*, waiters, and wine-waiter flocked forth to greet these two belated patrons and deferentially escorted them round the garden restaurant. Hidden behind shrubbery, a small string orchestra broke into discreetly muted music. Everyone seemed contributing to a well-composed stage-effect, and even Antoine, as he followed Anne across the garden, walked with the studied ease of a star actor making his entrance in a play that he knows well.

The tables were tactfully isolated from each other by privet hedges and flowers on stands. When at last Anne fixed on a table, her first move was to install her little dog on a cushion that the proprietor smilingly placed on the ground beside her. It was a pink cushion, for everything at the Coq was pink, from the begonias in the flower-beds to the tablecloths, the sunshades, and the lanterns hanging from the trees.

Before taking her seat, Anne studied the menu methodically, for she liked to affect an expert interest in food. Attended by his minions, the headwaiter stood by, a pencil to his lips, silently attentive. Anne turned to Antoine and with an ungloved finger pointed to certain items. She believed, and with some reason, that he was jealous of his prerogatives and would not wish her to address herself directly to any of the waiters in attendance.

Antoine gave the order in the firm if genial tones he employed on such occasions. The headwaiter took down his instructions with little gestures of approval and respect. Antoine watched him write. The obsequious manners of the staff pleased him and he was not far from believing, ingenuously enough, that they actually liked him. "After all," he thought, "why shouldn't they?"

"Oh, what a darling little kitten!" Anne exclaimed, pointing to a small black imp of mischief that had just sprung onto the buffet and that the waiters were trying to dislodge with scandalized flicks of their napkins. It was a six-week-old kitten, soot-black, with curiously vivid green eyes deep-set in an enormous head; the little belly was distended, though the animal looked half-starved.

Anne picked it up with both hands and, laughing, held it to her cheek.

Antoine smiled, but he felt slightly irritated.

"Do put it down, Anne. It's a mass of fleas. And you'll get yourself scratched."

"No, you're not a mass of fleas, are you, pussykins?" Anne hugged the dirty little creature to her breast and began stroking its head with her chin. "Did you ever see such a tummy! Like a little football, isn't it? And the size of his head! He looks like an onion that's sprouting—ever notice, Tony, the funny faces onions make when they're starting to sprout?"

Mastering his impatience, Antoine laughed—rather constrainedly. It was so rare for him to laugh that he heard himself now with surprise, and suddenly was struck by a peculiar quality in his laugh. "Good Lord," he thought, with a curious discomfiture, "the way I laughed just then sounded exactly like Father!" Antoine had never paid heed to M. Thibault's laugh during his lifetime, and suddenly, amazingly, tonight he heard it again, coming from his own mouth!

Anne was trying to force the ugly little animal to stay on her lap—with dire results for her silk skirt. "Naughty pussykins!" She seemed enchanted by its "naughtiness." "Now purr, you little devil! … There you are, he's purring! He understood me. I'm sure he has a soul," she added in all seriousness. "Tony dear, do please buy him for me. He'll be our mascot. As long as we have him, he'll keep bad luck away from us."

"There you are!" Antoine grinned. "Now will you dare to tell me that you're not superstitious?"

He had already teased her on that score. She had confessed to him that some nights when she went up to her room and, feeling restless, could not bring herself to go to bed—because she had a premonition of misfortune—she would take from the drawer in which she kept the relics of her past a shabby old fortune-telling manual and tell her fortune by the cards till she dropped asleep.

"You're right," she said abruptly. "I'm talking nonsense."

She released the cat; it sprang away rather clumsily and slunk into the bushes. After making sure they were alone, she gazed deeply into Antoine's eyes and whispered: "Yes, do lecture me—I adore it. I'll attend to every word. I'll mend my ways. And I'll become the woman you want me to be."

It struck him that perhaps she loved him more than he would have wished. Smiling, he signed to her to drink her soup, and she obeyed him like a child, her eyes fixed on the plate.

Then she began speaking of quite different matters—of the summer holidays which she had decided to spend in Paris so as not to be away from Antoine; of the sensational murder-case, in which politics and passion played equal parts, details of which had been filling several columns of the papers for some days past.

"What a nerve she had! How I'd love to do something like that! For you, Tony. Kill someone who wanted to injure you." In the distance the two violins, alto and 'cello, began to play a minuet. For a while she seemed lost in dreams. Then she added, in a vibrant undertone, like a caress: "To kill—for love!"

"Well, you have the right appearance for that sort of thing." Antoine smiled.

She was about to reply when the headwaiter came up carrying a large silver dish exhaling savoury fumes of *salmis*; before carving the pigeons it contained, he reverently presented it for her inspection.

Antoine observed that tears were trembling on her eyelashes, and threw her a questioning glance. Unintentionally, had he wounded her?

"That's perhaps truer than you think," she sighed, without looking toward him and in such a puzzling tone that he could not help thinking once again of Goupillot's end.

"How do you mean, 'truer'?" He could not conceal his curiosity.

Struck by his tone, she looked up and caught a curious gleam in his eye, which baffled her at first. Then suddenly she recalled their talk about poisons, and Antoine's questions. She was well aware of the suspicion that had fixed on her after her husband's death; a local paper had actually published an attack on her in scantily veiled terms. The effect had been definitely to establish in the region the legend of an old multimillionaire kept prisoner in his chateau by a young adventuress whom he had married late in life, and of the old man's death one night under circumstances which had never been cleared up.

Steadying his voice, Antoine repeated: "How do you mean, 'truer'?"

"I mean that I've the face of a melodrama heroine," she replied in a calm voice, not wishing to let him see that she had guessed his thought. She had taken a small mirror from her bag and was inspecting herself in it with seeming carelessness. "Look! Is that the face of someone destined to die tamely in a bed? No, I'll come to a dramatic end, you'll see. One morning I'll be found lying on my bedroom floor, stabbed to death. Stark naked—on the carpet—a stiletto in my heart. Haven't you noticed that women called Anne, in books, always die that way? Do you know"—her eyes were still intent on her reflected self—"I simply hate the thought of looking ugly when I'm dead! There's something so ghastly about the white lips of corpses. I want my lips and face to be made up nicely; as a matter of fact I've mentioned it in my will."

She was speaking more quickly than was her wont and lisping a little, as was her way when feeling ill at ease. With a corner of her handkerchief she dried the tears still lingering on her cheeks, and stowed away puff, handkerchief, and mirror in her bag.

"To tell the truth," she confessed, and now a slightly vulgar accent crept into the deep, melodious voice, "I don't really mind having the face of a melodrama heroine."

She turned toward him and saw that he was still watching her furtively. Then a slow smile crept to her lips and she seemed to come to a decision. "Still, my appearance has played me some nasty tricks," she sighed. "Do you know, some people think I poisoned my first husband?"

For a split second Antoine hesitated; his eyelids fluttered, then he murmured: "Yes, I know."

She rested her elbows on the table and, as her eyes sank deep into her lover's, she said in a calm, deliberate voice: "And do you think me capable of that?"

For all the bravado of her tone; her eyes would not meet his, and again she gazed straight in front of her.

"Why not?" he asked, half bantering, half in earnest.

For some moments she stared pensively at the tablecloth. The thought that uncertainty might give a fillip to Antoine's feelings for her crossed her mind; she was almost tempted to leave him with his doubts. But no sooner had she raised her eyes and looked at him than the temptation left her.

"No," she said harshly. "The facts aren't so—so romantic. As chance would have it, I was alone with Goupillot on the night he died. But he died a natural death—I had nothing whatever to do with it."

Antoine's silence, the way he was listening, seemed to imply he expected further details. She pushed her plate away, untouched, and took a cigarette from her bag; Antoine let her light it herself, without a movement. It was one of the special "tea-leaf" cigarettes that were supplied her from New York and gave off a heady, acrid aroma of burnt herbs. She took two or three puffs, leisurely breathed forth the smoke, then murmured: "Are you really interested in all that old gossip?"

"Yes," Antoine answered, a shade too soon, too eagerly.

Smiling, she made a little, graceful movement as if to wave away a childish importunity.

Meanwhile Antoine's thoughts were wandering far afield. A remark of Anne's came back to him: "To keep my end up in life, I've developed such a habit of lying that if you catch me telling you a lie some day, you mustn't get vexed—but just point it out to me at once!" In the present instance he hardly knew what to think, for, on occasion, to serve her ends (as he was well aware), Anne could assume an air of injured innocence that was highly disconcerting… .

"No! Do you want to choke him? Really you should know better than to give him bones!"

A young waiter had just placed a bowl in front of Laddie's cushion and, through excess of zeal, was about to add the pigeons' carcasses.

The headwaiter bustled up. "Anything you desire, Madame?"

"Nothing, thank you," Antoine said curtly; he was feeling annoyed.

The Pekinese had struggled to his feet and was inspecting the contents of the bowl. He stretched himself, shook his ears and sniffed fretfully, then raised his little black snub-nose toward his mistress with a mournful air.

Anne looked down at him. "What's the trouble, Laddiekins?"

The *maître d'hôtel* echoed: "What's the trouble, Lady King?"

"Show me that," Anne said, rapping the bowl with her knuckles. "Why, good heavens, it's stone-cold! I told you, some warm hash. No fat," she added severely, pointing to a small greasy morsel. "Some rice, carrots, and a little meat minced fine. There's nothing very complicated about that, surely!"

"Take it away!" the *maître d'hôtel* commanded.

The young waiter picked up the bowl, stared for a moment at its contents, then started back submissively to the kitchen. But before turning he shot a quick glance at the table—a glance that Antoine intercepted.

Once they were alone again, Antoine turned to Anne.

"Really, darling, don't you think Master Laddie's a bit too fussy about his grub?"

"That waiter's a born idiot!" Anne broke in pettishly. "Did you see the way he stood there gaping at that bowl?"

"Perhaps"—Antoine's voice was gentle—"just then he was thinking that in some garret in the suburbs his wife and kids were at that very moment sitting down to-"

Impulsively Anne's fingers, warm, emotional, closed on his. "Yes, yes, Tony darling!" she broke in eagerly. "I see what you mean. It's awful to think of. Only—you wouldn't like Laddie to get ill, would you?" She seemed genuinely perplexed. "Why are you laughing? Look here, Tony, we really must give the poor fellow a tip—a special one for him. Quite a big tip—with Laddie's compliments."

For some moments she was lost in thought. "Just fancy!" she suddenly exclaimed. "My brother, too, started life as a waiter. At a little restaurant in the suburbs."

"I didn't know you had a brother," Antoine remarked. His tone and expression seemed to imply: "Of course, I really know next to nothing about you!"

"Oh, he's far away … if he's still alive. He enlisted in a colonial regiment and went to Indo-China. He must have settled down over there; I've never had a line from him." Gradually she had lowered her tone, always most emotive in its lowest range. "It's absurd—I could so easily have helped him." She fell silent again.

A pause came in their conversation; then Antoine returned to the attack. “So you weren’t there when he died?”

“Who do you mean?” Her lashes fluttered; she could not account for his persistence. Still it gave her a certain satisfaction, feeling Antoine so absorbed in her past life.

Suddenly she burst out laughing—a quite unexpected, gay, revealing laugh.

“Just fancy, the silliest thing is that I was accused of something I hadn’t done, and most likely I’d never have had the pluck to do—and no one ever suspected me of the ‘crime’ I’d really committed. I’ll tell you what it was. I didn’t feel at all easy about Goupillot’s will. So, during those last two years when he was in his dotage, I coolly transferred to myself a goodish slice of his fortune, after extracting a power of attorney from him, with the help of a Beauvais lawyer. Quite needlessly, as it turned out. The will was entirely in my favour and only left Huguette the share she was entitled to by law. But, after those seven years of hell, I guessed I had the right to help myself.” She ceased laughing, and her voice grew tender. “And you, Tony, are the first person whom I’ve ever told that to.”

She shivered a little.

“Feeling cold?” Antoine looked round for her cloak. It was late and there was a slight chill in the night air.

“No, I’m thirsty.” She held her glass toward the ice-pail.

He filled the glass with champagne and she drank eagerly, then lit another of her scented cigarettes, and, rising, drew her cloak round her shoulders. As she sat down she pulled her chair nearer Antoine’s. “Listen!” she said.

Moths were fluttering round the lanterns; there was a patter of tiny wings upon the sunshades over the tables. The orchestra had ceased playing and behind most of the windows of the hostelry the lights were out.

“It’s nice here,” she said, with a fond glance at her lover, “but I know somewhere where it would be even nicer!”

As he said nothing, taking his hand, she laid it palm upward on the tablecloth. He thought she was going to read its “lines.”

With a hasty “No!” he tried to free his hand. He had no patience with predictions of this sort; even the handsomest seemed so tame beside the future he had mapped out for himself.

“How silly you are!” she laughed, without releasing his wrist. “Look, this is what I want to do!” Bending quickly forward, she pressed her lips to his palm and kept them there for some moments.

With the other hand he gently stroked the small bowed head, inwardly contrasting the blind passion that was hers for him with the strict measure of his love for her.

Just then, as if she had read his thoughts, Anne raised her head a little. “I don’t expect you to love me as I love you,” she said. “All I ask is for you to let me love you.”

# Chapter II

VANHEEDE, who intended to go out, was busy making his morning cup of coffee on his oil-stove when there was a knock at the door. Jacques had come straight to him, without calling in at his own room first.

"What's the latest at Geneva?" he cheerfully inquired, as he deposited his valise on the floor.

At the far end of the room the little albino screwed up his eyes, peering at his visitor, whom he had recognized by his voice. "So you're back already, Baulthy?"

He walked toward Jacques, his doll-like hands extended, and, after a close inspection of his friend, remarked: "You're looking fit."

"Yes," Jacques agreed. "I'm in good form today."

And so it was, for, unexpectedly enough, his night in the train had been not merely restful; it had been a liberation. He had had the car to himself, had lain down and fallen asleep almost at once, and, on wakening at Culoz, had felt refreshed, zestful, indeed quite exceptionally happy, as if some weight—he knew not what—had been taken off his mind. As at the open window he drew deep breaths of the brisk morning air and watched the early sunbeams sweep the last shreds of night mist from the depths of the valleys, he had pored upon himself, trying to analyse the secret joy that flooded all his being. "At last," he thought, "we've something definite to aim at; the days of racking our brains with theories and points of dogma are over. The time has come for direct action—war against war."

He had no illusions as to the gravity of the situation; the moment was, he knew, supremely critical. But when he took stock of the impressions he had gleaned at Paris, the strong position taken up by the French Socialists, the unanimity of the leaders grouped round Jaurés and heartened by his pugnacious optimism, the entente which seemed in the making between the Socialist Party programme and that of the trade unions—everything tended to confirm his faith in the indomitable efficacy of the Socialist International.

"Sit down on the bed." Vanheede straightened out the crumpled sheets. "You'll have a cup of coffee with me, won't you, Baulthy?" (He had never brought himself to call Jacques by his Christian name.) "So all went well? Tell me about it. How are they taking it over there?"

"In Paris? Well, that depends on whom you mean. In the general public no one knows, so no one worries. It's appalling! The papers talk of nothing but the Caillaux case, Poincaré's triumphal reception in Russia, and—the vacations! It's believed that the French press has been given orders: public interest is to be switched off the trouble in the Balkans so as not to make things harder for the diplomats to straighten out. But the Party's feverishly active and, really, they seem to be getting excellent results. The plan for a general strike has been definitely put in the forefront of their programme. It will be the platform of the French delegates at the Vienna Congress. Obviously the doubtful point is the line the Social-Democrats intend to take; they've agreed in principle to consider the proposal again. But one can't be sure."

"Any news from Austria?" Vanheede put down the glass containing his coffee among the books strewn on the bedside table.

"Yes. Pretty good news, if true. Yesterday night at the Humanité office they seemed sure the Austrian note to Servia would not have an aggressive character."

"Listen, Baulthy," Vanheede suddenly blurted out, "I'm so glad you're back, it does me good to see you." Smiling to excuse his warmth, he went on at once. "Bühlmann's been here. He told us a story that comes from the Chancellery at Vienna, a story which goes to prove, on the contrary, that Austria has perfectly fiendish intentions and it's all been planned in advance… . Yes, the whole world's gone rotten!" he added gloomily.

"Tell me about it, old man." In Jacques's tone there was less curiosity than cordiality and affection. Evidently Vanheede noticed this, for, smiling, he came and sat beside Jacques on the bed.

"What he said was that the doctors called in to attend Franz Josef discovered that he was suffering from an incurable throat disease—so acute that the old Emperor will die before the year is out."

"In that case R.I.P. for Franz Josef!" For the moment Jacques was not inclined to take a tragic view of things. He had wound his handkerchief round the glass so as not to burn his fingers and was sipping the syrupy mixture brewed by Vanheede. Over the rim of the glass his eyes shot a friendly but incredulous glance at the albino's pale face and unruly shock of hair.

"Wait a moment!" Vanheede said. "I'm coming to the interesting part of it. The doctors' diagnosis was transmitted at once to the Chancellor. Berchtold, it seems, forthwith summoned to his country house the various political leaders, for a secret conference, a sort of Cabinet Council."

"Did he now!" Jacques chuckled.

"At that meeting, it seems, the gentlemen present—among them Tisza, Forgach, and Hôtzendorf, the Chief of Staff—-argued on the following lines. … In the prevailing state of home affairs, the Emperor's death was bound to plunge the country into chaos. Even if the Dual Monarchy weathered the storm, Austria would be hamstrung for some time to come. She would have to postpone indefinitely the reduction of Servia; and to ensure the future of the Empire the reduction of Servia was indispensable. What was to be done?"

Jacques had been listening with growing attention. "Why, launch the attack on Servia at an early date, before the old man's death—I suppose?"

"Exactly. But some go further still… ."

As Jacques watched Vanheede talking, he was struck once again by the contrast between the fragile form, the young seraphic face, like a blind angel's, and the stubborn force, the hard core of resolve behind that seeming blandness. "A strange little fellow!" He smiled to himself. He remembered occasions when, on Sundays, at one or another of the little inns beside the lake, he and his friends had engaged in heated political discussions and suddenly Vanheede had jumped up, muttering: "Everything's foul, the world is rotten!" run off into the garden like a child, hopped onto the swing, and started swinging.

"Some go further still," Vanheede went on in his high-pitched voice. "They say that the Sarajevo crime was arranged for by agents provocateurs in Berchtold's pay, to create the necessary pretext. Thereby, according to them, Berchtold killed two birds with one

stone: he got out of the way an inconvenient, too peace-loving heir to the throne, and at the same time made it possible to start a war on Servia before the Emperor's death."

Jacques laughed. "That's a good blood-and-thunder yarn you're telling!"

"Don't you believe it, Baulthy?"

"Well," Jacques replied in a serious tone, "I'm quite ready to believe that an ambitious man whose nature has been warped by a political career will stick at nothing, absolutely nothing, once he feels that he has all the power in his hands. History is one long record of such men's deeds. But I believe in something else, old man—that the most Machiavellian schemes will 'gang agley' when they come up against the will-to-peace of the masses."

"Do you think the Pilot shares your view?" Vanheede asked, shaking his head dubiously.

Jacques cast him a questioning look.

"I don't mean to say," the little Belgian went on rather uncomfortably, "that the Pilot says the opposite. Oh, no! But one always gets an impression that he doesn't really believe the masses will make a determined stand or are really bent on peace."

A shadow fell on Jacques's face. He knew well how Meynestrel's views differed from his own; but the thought was a distasteful one, and instinctively he brushed it aside.

"I assure you, Vanheede, that the desire for peace I spoke of is a very real thing," he said emphatically. "I've just come back from Paris and I'm full of confidence. At the present moment, not only in France but throughout Europe, there aren't ten per cent—no, not even five per cent—of the men who might be called up for service who'd approve of being drawn into a war."

"But the remaining ninety-five, Baulthy, aren't they just meek, sheep-like creatures who …?"

"Certainly. But suppose that among those ninety-five there are a dozen, even half a dozen, who realize the danger and refuse to be coerced? They'd constitute a whole army of recalcitrants for the various governments to reckon with. It's those six men in every hundred or so whom we must organize. It's perfectly feasible. In fact, it's just what all the revolutionaries in Europe are working for at present."

He rose from the bed. "What's the time?" he asked, glancing at his wrist. "I must go and see Meynestrel now."

"Not this morning," Vanheede said. "He's gone to Lausanne with Richardley, in a car."

"Damn! … Quite sure?"

"He had an appointment there at nine, about the Congress. They won't be back till noon."

"All right, I'll wait till then." Jacques looked annoyed. "What are you doing this morning?"

"I'd meant to go the Library, but-"

"Come with me to Saffrio's place; we'll talk on the way. I've a letter to deliver to him. I met Negretto in Paris." He picked up his valise and walked to the door. "Got to have a shave. Call for me in ten minutes, on your way down."

Saffrio lived in a small two-story house in the Rue de la Pélisserie near the Cathedral; the entire ground floor was occupied by his shop.

Little was known of Saffrio's past. His good humour and well-known readiness to oblige had won him general regard. He had been a registered member of the Italian Socialist Party before coming to Switzerland and had kept a drug-store in Geneva for seven years. He had left Italy as a result of "trouble with his wife," of which he often spoke but always in the vaguest terms, and which had brought him, some alleged, to the point of murder.

The shop was empty when Jacques and Vanheede entered. As the doorbell chimed, Saffrio appeared at the back entrance; his handsome southern eyes lit up on seeing them.

"*Buon giorno*!" Beaming, he wagged his head, gestured with his arms, rolled his lopsided shoulders, with the airs and graces of an Italian innkeeper welcoming a customer. "I've two of my countrymen down there," he breathed in Jacques's ear. "Come!"

He was always prepared to shelter Italian refugees against whom the Swiss government had passed deportation orders. As a general rule the Geneva police were easy-going enough, but now and again a wave of zeal came over them, as inopportune as it was brief, involving the expulsion from Swiss territory of all foreign revolutionaries whose papers were not in order. The cleaning-up process lasted a week or so, during which its victims usually did no more than quit their lodgings and lie low in some friend's home till the danger had blown over and the sky was clear again. Saffrio specialized in this form of hospitality.

Jacques and Vanheede followed him across the shop.

The door at the back of it opened into a narrow kitchen behind which there was a larger room formerly used as a larder. It had a close resemblance to a dungeon; the roof was vaulted, and high in the wall a small barred window giving on an empty courtyard let in a feeble light. But it was admirably fitted for a hiding-place and, as it could accommodate a fair number of people, Meynestrel sometimes used it for small private meetings. One wall was taken up by shelves piled up with utensils discarded from the shop: unserviceable mortars, bottles, empty jars. A framed portrait of Karl Marx lorded it on the top shelf; the glass was cracked and grey with dust.

Two Italians were in this cell-like room. One, a quite young man in tattered garments, was sitting at a table. Before him was a dish of cold macaroni and tomatoes which he was scooping up with the point of a knife onto a slice of bread. He looked up at the intruders, then continued eating; his eyes had the gentle sadness of a wounded animal's.

The other man, older and better dressed, was standing, holding a sheaf of documents. He came forward to greet the visitors. Jacques had met him already at Berlin; he was an Italian newspaperman named Remo Tutti. There was something rather effeminate about the little man, but his eyes were keen, sparkling with intelligence.

Saffrio pointed to Tutti. "Remo got here from Livorno yesterday."

"I've just come from Paris," Jacques said to Saffrio, taking a letter from his pocketbook. "Guess whom I ran across there and who gave me this letter!"

The Italian snatched at the letter with a cry of joy: "Negretto!"

Jacques sat down, turning to Tutti. "Negretto tells me that under colour of army manoeuvres 80,000 reservists have been called up and equipped during the last fortnight. Is that so?"

"Not more than 55 or 60,000 anyhow. Si. But what Negretto may not know is that there's been serious trouble in the army. Especially in the northern garrisons. Any number of mutinies! The General Staff can't cope with the situation. They've practically had

to give up court-martialling the men."

Vanheede's piping voice rose in the silence. "You see! Disobedience is enough. No violence. And then we'll have an end of bloodshed on the earth."

Everyone—except Vanheede—smiled. Blushing, the little albino locked his hands and said no more.

"You think, then," Jacques said, "that in the event of general mobilization there'd be trouble?"

"Not the faintest doubt," Tutti replied emphatically.

Saffrio's nose bobbed up from the letter he was reading. "In my country when the militarists try their little games, everybody—Socialist or not—joins up against them."

"We," Tutti explained, "have an advantage over you; we have experience. The Tripoli campaign is still fresh in our memories. Our people have been through the mill; they know what it can cost, letting the army take control. I'm not thinking only of the sufferings of the poor fellows at the front, but of the rot that immediately attacks the country's life: the suppression of all freedom, jingo propaganda, the cost of living soaring up, the plague of *profittori*. Italy's gone through all that already. And she's forgotten nothing. Yes, in our country, if we're faced with mobilization, it'll be child's play for the Party to fix up another Red Week."

Carefully folding up the letter, Saffrio tucked it into his shirt and turned toward Jacques. In the comely, bronzed face the dark eyes were radiant. "*Grazie!*" he said.

The youngster at the far end of the room had risen. With both hands he lifted from the table a tall j ug of porous earthenware, tilted it above his lips, and took a long draught of the ice-cold water.

"*Basta!*" Saffrio grinned as the young man went on drinking, and, going up to him, playfully tweaked the nape of his neck. "Now, comrade, I'll take you upstairs. You must have a nap."

The young Italian followed him obediently into the kitchen, giving the others a graceful nod as he went by.

On the threshold Saffrio looked round and said to Jacques: "You may be sure our Mussolini's warnings in the *Avanti* haven't fallen on deaf ears. The King and his ministers know now that the people won't follow them if they try to rush the country into a war."

Their footsteps rang, receding, up the little wooden staircase that led to the top floor.

Jacques was in a brown study. He pushed back his hair and turned to Tutti. "That's what has got to be brought to the notice of—I won't say the leaders, who know more than even we about it—to the notice of those nationalist groups in Germany and Austria which are still counting on the Triple Alliance and urging their governments to take violent measures… . Have you still got your job in Berlin?"

"No,". Tutti replied briefly. His tone, the cryptic smile that crossed his face, implied quite clearly: "No use asking questions. My job is—nobody's business!"

Just then Saffrio came back, chuckling to himself. "Those youngsters—bless them!" he confided to Vanheede. "They'll swallow anything! That young ass got nicely caught by an *agent provocateur* yesterday. Luckily the boy is a good sprinter—and knew old Papa Saffrio's address." He turned cheerfully to Jacques. "Well, Thibault, so your trip to Paris gave you the impression that all is going well?"

Jacques's face lit up. "Better than well!" he cried enthusiastically.

Vanheede moved to another chair and sat down beside Jacques, with his back to the light. He suffered like a night-bird when he had the light in his eyes.

"I didn't meet only Frenchmen," Jacques continued. "I spoke to Belgians, Russians, and Germans as well. All over Europe the revolutionaries are on the *qui vive*. They've realized the gravity of the crisis. Everywhere they're getting together, arranging a concerted plan of action. Yes, the antiwar campaign is definitely taking form and it's most comforting to see how—in less than a week—the movement has spread, how unanimous they all are. It shows what forces the Socialist International can set in motion when it chooses. And what's been happening lately on a small scale, by driblets, in the various capitals, is nothing beside what's contemplated. The International Council is to meet at Brussels next week, you know… ."

"Si, *si!*" exclaimed Tutti and Saffrio in one breath, fired by Jacques's enthusiasm, their eyes fixed eagerly on his face.

The albino, too, bent forward and peered up blinkingly at Jacques, who was seated beside him. He had slipped an arm along the back of Jacques's chair and his hand rested on his friend's shoulder—so lightly that Jacques did not feel it.

"Jaurés and his group," Jacques went on, "attach the greatest importance to that meeting. Twenty-two countries are sending delegates. And these delegates represent not only the twelve million Socialist workers, but millions of others who are in sympathy with them—all those who are of two minds about socialism and even some who're in our enemies' camp but realize that, when a war is threatening, only the Socialist International can embody and give effect to the masses' desire for peace. Yes, the Brussels week will make history. For the first time on record the voice of the people, of the true majority, will be able to make itself heard. And obeyed!"

Saffrio was fidgeting with excitement. "Bravo!" he shouted. "Bravo!"

"And we must look still further ahead." Jacques yielded to the pleasure of strengthening his confidence by voicing it aloud. "If we win through, it will be not only a great battle won against war. It'll be more than that: a victory which may give socialism—" Just then Jacques grew conscious that Vanheede's little hand was resting on his shoulder; it had begun trembling all at once. Turning, he patted his friend's knee. "Yes, Vanheede, old man, what's on foot just now may well mean nothing more nor less than the world-wide triumph of socialism—and without any recourse to violence." He jumped up from his chair. "Now let's go and see if the Pilot's back."

It was still a little too early to count on finding Meynestrel at home.

"Come and sit down a bit at the Café over there," Jacques suggested, slipping his arm through Vanheede's.

The albino shook his head. He had wasted quite enough time already. Since, following Jacques, he had settled at Geneva he had given up working as a typist and specialized in historical research. The work was not so well paid, but he was his own master. For two months he had been ruining his eyesight, collating material for a book entitled *Protestant Records* that a Leipzig publisher was bringing out.

Jacques accompanied him to the Public Library. Then, as he happened to be passing the Café Landolt—which with the Griitli shared the patronage of the younger generation of Socialists—and was feeling lonely, he turned in.

To his surprise, Paterson was there. The Englishman, in white flannel trousers, was busy hanging pictures for an exhibition that the proprietor had authorized him to give on the premises.

Paterson seemed in high spirits. He had just turned down a magnificent proposal. An American by the name of Saxton Clegg, impressed by Paterson's still-lifes, had offered him fifty dollars for a life-sized portrait of the late Mrs. Clegg, who had perished in the Mont Pelee catastrophe. The portrait was to be copied from a faded photograph, of the size of a visiting-card. The disconsolate widower had insisted on one point only: that Mrs. Clegg's costume should be transformed so as to come in line with the latest Paris fashions. Paterson spiced the story with a fine flow of humour.

"Pat," Jacques thought, hearing the young Englishman's peals of laughter, "is the only one of us capable of any real gaiety, genuine, spontaneous high spirits."

"I'll come along with you, old chap, for a bit of the way," Paterson said, on learning that Jacques was going to see Meynestrel. "I've been getting some rather funny letters from England these last few days. They say in London that Haldane is fixing up, on the q.t., a slap-up expeditionary force. He means to be ready for anything. And the fleet's still mobilized. By the way, have you read the papers—about the Spithead review? Military and naval attaches, it seems, from all over Europe have been formally invited to watch, for six solid hours, the British fleet steam past, in single file and in the closest possible formation—like those processions of caterpillars one sees here in the spring, don't you know! It'll be a damned fine show, I expect. Just window-dressing, of course," he added with a derisive gesture.

There was a hint of pride behind the sarcasm in Paterson's voice, and Jacques noted it with inward amusement. "An Englishman," he thought, "however socialistic, can never help being thrilled by a fine naval pageant."

"By the way, what about our portrait?" Paterson asked as he was saying good-bye. "There seems to be a hoodoo on it, doesn't there? Two sittings are all I need—honour bright! Two mornings. But when?"

Jacques knew the Englishman's obstinacy. Better give in, he thought, and get it over.

"Will tomorrow do? At eleven?"

"Righto. You're a damned good pal, Jacques. Thank you… ."

Alfreda was by herself. In her big-flowered kimono, with her lacquer-black bangs and eyelashes, her likeness to a Japanese doll was too pronounced not to be intentional. Flies were buzzing in the sunbeams filtering through the Venetian blind. The sickening smell of a cauliflower boiling in the kitchen pervaded the little flat.

She seemed delighted at seeing Jacques again. "Yes, the Pilot's back. But he's just sent a message to me by Monier that some news has come in and he's conferring with Richardley at Headquarters. I'm to join him there, with my typewriter. Why don't you have lunch with me?" Her look had suddenly grown earnest. "Then we might go there together."

Her dark, exotic eyes were fixed on him, and he had a fleeting impression that it was not out of pure friendliness she had chanced the invitation. Was it to have an opportunity for questioning or confiding in him? Anyhow, the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* lunch with Alfreda did not appeal to him, and he wished to see Meynestrel as soon as possible.

He declined.

The Pilot was at work in his little office at the Talking Shop. Only Richardley was with him. Richardley was seated, Meynestrel standing behind him, and both were bending over documents spread out on the table.

When he saw Jacques come in, a gleam of friendly surprise flickered in Meynestrel's eyes. Then his sharp gaze steadied—an idea had just crossed his mind—and, stooping down, he cast a questioning glance at Richardley, indicating Jacques with a jerk of his chin. "As he's back, why not give him the job?"

"Certainly," Richardley agreed.

"Sit down," Meynestrel said to Jacques. "We've almost done." Then he turned to Richardley. "Get this down, please. It's for the Swiss group."

In his harsh, toneless voice he began dictating: "Your question is misplaced. That is not the issue. In their day Marx and Engels might take sides with this nation or with that. We cannot. We, the Socialists of 1914, may not differentiate between the various European nations. The war in prospect is an imperialist war. Its aims are linked up wholly with the interests of finance capital. All nations, in this respect, fly the same flag. The one aim of the proletariat must be the downfall of the imperialist powers, without distinction. I advise *absolute neutrality*. (Underline that.) In this war the two capitalist groups will mutually destroy each other. Our policy is to let them do so. More, to help them to destroy each other. (No. Strike those words out.) To turn the situation to the best account. All the dynamism is in the left wing. It is the duty of the revolutionary minorities to do their best to raise this dynamism to its highest pitch during the period of crisis, so as to be able, when the time comes, to make the breach through which the revolution will advance."

He ceased dictating. After a while he muttered hurriedly: "Why doesn't Freda come?" then began scribbling brief notes on a memorandum-pad, tearing off the sheets and passing them to Richardley. "That's for the committee. This one for Berne and Basel. This for Zürich."

At last he rose and went up to Jacques. "So you didn't stay on?"

"You said: 'If you haven't heard from me by Sunday or Monday-' "

"That's so. I thought I was on the track of something, but it led nowhere. As a matter of fact, I was just going to write and tell you to stay on in Paris."

To stay in Paris! A curious perturbation, the origin of which he did not stop to analyse, came over Jacques. And with a sort of mental cowardice, with a vague satisfaction at saddling others with a responsibility that properly was his, he suddenly reflected: "Well, it's their doing, not mine."

Meynestrel went on speaking. "It may suit our purposes to have someone there just now. The reports you send in have their uses, they're a kind of temperature-chart of a milieu I know little of. Keep an eye on what's going on in the *Humanité* group—more than on the C.G.T. We've other sources of information about the C.G.T. For instance, the dealings between Jaurés and the Social-Democrats, and the English Socialists. Also, what strings he's pulling at the Quai d'Orsay as regards Franco-Russian relations… . But I've told you all that already. So you got back this morning? Not too tired?"

"Not a bit."

"Feel like starting off again?"

"At once?"

"Tonight."

"If necessary, yes. To Paris?"

Meynestrel smiled. "No. You'll make a little detour on the way, through Brussels and Antwerp. Richardley will explain." In a low voice he added: "She promised to come here immediately after lunch."

Richardley closed the timetable he had been studying and raised his sharp nose toward Jacques. "You have a train at seven-fifteen tonight which gets you to Basel at about two a.m. You'll reach Brussels at noon tomorrow. From Brussels you take the first train to Antwerp. You must be at Antwerp tomorrow, Wednesday, before three p.m. It's a job that requires careful handling, as you're to get in touch with Kniabrovski and he's under pretty strict surveillance. Do you know him?"

"Kniabrovski? Yes, very well indeed."

Before meeting the man, Jacques had heard much about him in revolutionary circles. Vladimir Kniabrovski had just completed a term of imprisonment in Russia. No sooner was he released than he resumed his career as agitator. Jacques had met him in Geneva during the previous winter and had even, with Zelavsky's help, translated for the Swiss press some chapters of the book Kniabrovski had written in prison.

"Don't be too sure!" Richardley said. "He's clean-shaven now and looks quite different, I'm told."

Richardley was standing, bending forward a little, his thin lips set in their habitual smile, and his shrewd, rather supercilious gaze was fixed on Jacques.

Meynestrel, his hands behind his back, was pacing to and fro in the little room, to restore the circulation in his injured leg. His face was anxious. Suddenly he turned to Jacques. "Tell me—in Paris they had a blind conviction Austria would act with moderation, hadn't they?"

"Yes. At the *Humanité* yesterday it was said that the Austrian note doesn't even contemplate any delay."

"That remains to be seen." Meynestrel had turned from the window, whence he had been gazing down into the courtyard, and was walking toward Jacques.

"Yes?" Jacques murmured. A faint shudder ran down his spine, and a light film of sweat formed on his forehead.

"Hosmer knew what he was talking about," Richardley observed in a cold, detached voice. "Events are moving fast."

There was a short silence. The Pilot had started pacing up and down again. His nerves were unmistakably on edge. Jacques wondered if his anxiety concerned Austria—or Alfreda's absence.

"Vaillant and Jaurés are right," he said. "The governments must be made to realize there's no chance of getting the masses to accept any policy involving war. They must be forced to submit to arbitration—by the threat of a general strike. As you know, the motion was voted a week ago at the French Congress, with a big majority. In any case, everyone's agreed to it on principle. In Paris they're busy trying to find a way of convincing the Germans and getting them to declare themselves as explicitly as we have done."

Richardley shook his head. "Waste of time. They'll never consent. And their argument—it's the time-worn argument of Plekhanov and Liebknecht—is a sound one: as between two unequally socialized nations, the more socialized is at the mercy of the less socialized one. That's self-evident."

"The Germans are hypnotized by the Russian peril."

"Naturally enough. It will be another story when Russia has evolved, socially speaking, to such a point that it's possible to launch a strike in both countries simultaneously."

Jacques refused to give in. "For one thing, we can no longer be so sure that strikes must be ruled out in Russia—anyhow, partial strikes like the one at the Putilov factory, which, if extended to other industrial centres, may very well give a lot of trouble to the military faction. But let's leave Russia out. There's a definite argument with which we can counter the prejudice of the Social-Democrats against a strike. We can say: An order for a general strike to be declared automatically on the day of mobilization would be a danger for Germany—that's granted. But what about a *preventive* strike? A strike launched by the Socialist Party during the preliminary phase of international tension, while the diplomats are bandying notes—long before there's any question of mobilization? The mere threat of such a setback to the nation's forces—provided it was patently in earnest-would be enough to force your government to consent to arbitration.' None of the German objections could stand up against that argument. And that, I understand, is the platform which the French Party proposes to adopt at the Brussels Congress."

Standing at the table, his head bent over the documents that strewed it, Meynestrel had seemed completely unmindful of their discussion. Now, straightening up, he came and planted himself between Jacques and Richardley. A faintly ironic smile glimmered on his face.

"Now, children, off with you! I've work to do. We'll talk later. Come back, both of you, at four." He cast an almost frightened glance toward the window. "I can't understand why Freda …" he began, then turned to Richardley. "Firstly, give Jacques precise instructions for his meeting with Kniabrovski. Secondly, fix up money matters with him; he may be away for two or three weeks."

As he spoke he shepherded them toward the door, which he closed behind them.

# Chapter III

UNDER the blazing sunlight of that summer afternoon Antwerp sweltered like a city of the South.

Blinking with the glare, Jacques looked up at the station-clock. Ten-past three. The Amsterdam train was not due in till three-twenty-three. It would be wiser to let himself be seen as little as possible within the station premises.

As he crossed the thoroughfare he cast a quick glance over the people sitting on the terrace of a Café opposite. Evidently his survey reassured him, for, noticing an empty table in a corner, he sat down at it and ordered beer. The square in front was almost empty, despite the hour. All the passers-by kept to the sidewalk on the shady side, making the same detour, like a procession of ants. Tramcars coming from all parts of the town, trailing beneath them slabs of shadow, crisscrossed in the middle of the square, their overheated wheels groaning on the curves.

At three-twenty Jacques made a move, turning leftward so as to enter the station from the side. There were few people about. A decrepit Belgian porter wearing a képi was describing figures-of-eight with a watering-can on the dusty flagstones.

At a platform on an upper level the train had just come in.

Reading his paper, Jacques took his stand at the foot of the steps marked *Exit* leading from the platforms; passengers were beginning to come down. Without fixing his eyes on anyone in particular, with feigned indifference, he watched them flocking down the stairs. A man in the fifties, wearing a cap, went by. He was dressed in a grey suit; a sheaf of newspapers was tucked under his arm. The crowd rapidly thinned out; soon only a few laggards remained, some old women laboriously descending the steps.

Then, as though the person he had been expecting had failed to show up, Jacques turned and walked quietly away from the station. Only a skilled detective, on the lookout for it, would have noticed the quick glance he cast over his shoulder before stepping off the sidewalk.

He walked along the avenue up to a wide crossing, at which he hesitated, like a tourist taking his bearings. Then, swerving to the right, he walked past the Lyric Theatre, pausing a moment to scan the play-bills, and turned unhurrying into one of the little public gardens in front of the Law Courts. Noticing an empty bench, he sank onto it, mopping his brow.

On the path in front some children, untroubled by the heat, were playing ball. Jacques took a sheaf of folded newspapers from his pocket and laid it beside him on the bench. He lit a cigarette. The ball rolled to his feet; laughing, he picked it up and made as if to pocket it. The children gathered round him, shrilly protesting. He threw the ball and joined in their game.

After some minutes another loiterer came and seated himself at the other end of the bench. He was carrying a bundle of untidily folded newspapers. The man had a foreign look; Slav, most likely. The peak of his cap was pulled well down and hid his forehead; the prominent cheekbones showed as highlights in its shadow. The beardless face was that of an elderly man—gnarled and ravaged but vividly alert. His skin, weathered a rich pie-crust hue, effectively set off his eyes, which, though it was hard to fix their colour in the shadow of the cap, were a pale, intensely luminous blue-grey.

The man took a small cigar from his pocket and, turning to Jacques, politely touched his cap-peak. To light his cigar at Jacques's cigarette, he leaned forward, resting on the bench the hand that held the newspapers. Their eyes met. The man straightened up and placed the bundle of newspapers on his knees. Adroitly he had taken his neighbour's papers and left his own on the bench beside Jacques, who casually but promptly laid his hand upon them.

His eyes fixed on the middle distance, without a flutter of his lips, in a barely audible voice—that brittle, ventriloquial voice the knack of which is learned in prisons—the man said:

"The letter's hidden in the papers. And there're some of the latest issues of *Pravda*."

Jacques gave no sign of having heard, but went on playing with the children as if nothing had happened. He threw the ball, the children rushed away, there was a general scuffle to get hold of it, the winner brought it back triumphantly, and then the game started anew.

The elderly man was laughing; he too seemed to find pleasure in the children's antics. Very soon it was to him they handed the ball, as he could throw it farther than Jacques. Once the two men were alone, Kniabrovski seized the opportunity and, his teeth still clenched, began speaking in little, jerky phrases, which he poured out excitedly in a hissing undertone.

"At Petersburg, on Monday, a hundred and forty thousand strikers. A hundred and forty thousand. Martial law in certain quarters of the city. Telephone wires cut, no trams running. Mounted police charges. Four whole regiments with machine-guns called up. Cossack regiments, detachments from—"

The children rushed up in a bunch, gathered round the seat. He drowned the last words in a fit of coughing.

"But the police, the army are helpless," he went on, after launching the ball into the middle of a lawn. "One riot after another! The government had handed out French flags, for Poincaré's visit; the women changed them into red flags. Cavalry charges, volleys. I saw a pitched battle in the Viborg quarter. Terrible it was! Another one near the Warsaw station. Another in the Stagara-Derevnia suburb. Another in the middle of the night at-"

He paused again; the children were back. And suddenly in a burst of hungry affection he caught hold of the youngest—a pale, fair-haired boy of four or five—drew him onto his knee, laughing, and gave him a loud kiss on the mouth. Then he put down the startled child, took the ball, and threw it.

"The strikers aren't armed. They've only paving-stones, bottles, kerosene cans. To hold up the charges they fire houses. I saw the Semsonievsky Bridge burnt down. There were fires everywhere, all night. Hundreds killed. Hundreds and hundreds of arrests. All the suspects pulled in. Our newspapers have been forbidden since Sunday. Our editors are in jail. The revolution's begun. High time it was; but for the revolutions, there'd be war. That Poincaré of yours, he's done a lot of harm in our country, a damned lot of harm."

Looking toward the lawn where the children were scuffling for the ball, he twisted his lips in an expression, meant for a laugh, that was an ugly snarl.

"Now," he said gloomily, "I'm off."

"Right!" Jacques breathed. Though there was no one near, it was useless to prolong the interview. Nervously he whispered: "Going back—there?"

Kniabrovski did not reply at once. His elbows propped on his knees, he was bending forward, staring at the gravel between his feet. His body seemed to have-suddenly gone limp, crumpled up. Jacques noticed the lines of resignation—truer to say, of patience—that long, hard years had graven on either side of his mouth.

"Yes, I'm going back." He raised his head and his eyes roamed the scene before them—the garden, distant houses, and blue sky—without settling anywhere; they had the haunted, obdurate look of a man who will stick at nothing this side of madness … and beyond. "By the sea route. Hamburg. I'll have no trouble going back. But over there, you know, things are getting difficult… ."

He rose slowly from the seat.

"Very difficult indeed."

At last he turned toward Jacques and touched his cap politely, like a chance-met stranger taking leave. Their eyes exchanged a look of anguish, of fraternity.

"*Vdobryi tchass!* Good luck!" he whispered before moving away.

The laughing, romping children escorted him as far as the gate. Jacques followed him with his eyes. When the Russian was out of sight, he thrust into his pocket the sheaf of newspapers that had been left lying on the bench. Then, rising, he resumed his stroll.

That night, after sewing into the lining of his coat the letter given him by Kniabrovski, he left Antwerp for Brussels, and there took the train to Paris.

Next day, Thursday, at a very early hour, he handed over the secret missive to Chenavon, who was due to reach Geneva that night.

# Chapter IV

ON THE following day, Thursday the twenty-third, Jacques dropped in early in the morning at the Café du Progrès to read the papers. He seated himself at a table on the ground floor, wishing to keep clear of the meeting rooms upstairs.

The account of the trial of Mme. Caillaux filled the whole front page of every one of the dailies.

On the second or third page a few of them had somewhat reluctantly inserted a short statement to the effect that strikes had broken out at some works in St. Petersburg, but that this labour unrest had promptly been quelled by strong police measures. As against this, there were entire columns devoted to the festivities ordained by the Tsar in honour of M. Poincaré.

As for the Austro-Servian dispute, the papers were discreetly reticent. A note—officially inspired, no doubt—with virtually the same wording in each instance, stated definitely that in Russian government circles it was generally held that an easing of the strain was bound to ensue very shortly as the result of the action being taken through the usual diplomatic channels, while most of the writers politely expressed their trust in Germany, a country which throughout the Balkan crisis had never failed to preach moderation to her Austrian ally.

The *Action Française* alone openly voiced its uneasiness. It made the most of the opportunity thus offered for incriminating more violently than ever the innate weakness of the republican government in the matter of foreign policy, and of holding up to scorn the unpatriotic behaviour of the parties of the left. The Socialists came in for special abuse. No longer satisfied with repeating as he had done every day for many years that Jaurés was a traitor in the pay of Germany, Charles Maurras, revolted by the emotional appeals to international pacifism published in ever-increasing numbers by the *Humanité*, now appeared to single out Jaurés as a fitting object for the dagger of some avenging spirit of the Charlotte Corday type. "We would incite no man to political murder," he wrote with a boldness tempered by caution, "but let M. Jaurés quake in his shoes! His leading article may very well inspire some unbalanced zealot with the desire of putting to the test whether it is a fact that nothing would be altered in the immutable order of things were M. Jean Jaurés to meet with the same end as M. Calmette."

Cadieux rushed by on his way to the street. "Aren't you going upstairs?" he asked. "They're at it hammer and tongs up there. It's quite thrilling. There's an Austrian delegate, Comrade Boehm, who's just turned up from Vienna. He says the Austrian note is to be handed in at Belgrade this evening, the moment Poincaré leaves St. Petersburg."

"D'you mean to say Boehm's in Paris?" Jacques exclaimed, jumping up from his seat, overjoyed at the prospect of having another talk with the Austrian.

He ran up the little spiral staircase, pushed open the door, and presently caught sight of Boehm with a mug of beer in front of him, his yellow raincoat neatly folded on his knees. Some fifteen militants were crowding round him, plying him with questions. Boehm was answering each in turn, chewing the stump of his eternal cigar.

He greeted Jacques with a friendly nod, as though he had only just taken leave of him the day before. The news he brought with him as to the war-fever prevailing in Vienna and the general pugnacity of Austro-Hungarian public opinion seemed to have aroused widespread indignation and anxiety. An aggressive ultimatum from Austria to Servia, should it materialize, seemed likely in the present circumstances to have all the more serious consequences in that a warning note had been circulated by the Servian Prime Minister to every chancellery in Europe, advising the powers not to count too much on Servia's remaining passive and stating that she was now determined to reject any demand derogatory to her dignity.

Without in any way attempting to justify the irresponsible policy of his country, Boehm did his best to account for the resentment felt in Austria toward Servia, and incidentally toward Russia, as a result of the continual pinpricks her truculent little neighbour, supported and egged on by the Russian giant, kept inflicting on the Austrian national pride.

"Hosmer," he declared, "read me a confidential diplomatic note sent several years ago by Sazonov, the Foreign Minister at St. Petersburg, to the Russian Ambassador to Servia. Sazonov expressly refers to the fact that a certain slice of Austrian territory has been promised to the Servians by Russia. A highly important document," he added, "for it's a proof that Servia and her evil genius, Russia, are a constant menace to the security of *Österreich*."

"So it's the same story! The capitalists are on their usual political racket!" an old workman in blue overalls shouted from the far end of the table. "Every government in Europe, whether it calls itself democratic or not, with its underhand diplomacy in which the people have no say, is just a tool in the hands of those international money-grubbers! And if Europe's been spared a general war during the last forty years, it's only because it suits the financiers' purposes to keep up a state of armed peace, in which the nations are getting deeper and deeper into debt. But the moment it pays the big banks for a war to break out—well, you'll see!"

They all assented vociferously. Little did they care that the interruption had but the remotest bearing on the subject Boehm was expounding.

A young fellow whom Jacques knew by sight, and whose watchful, fever-bright eyes and consumptive features had caught his attention, suddenly emerged from his silence and began quoting in a hollow voice a dictum by Jaurés on the perils of secret diplomacy.

Taking advantage of the ensuing uproar, Jacques went up to Boehm and made an appointment for them to have lunch together. After which he slipped away, leaving the Austrian to pursue his exposition with the same patient obstinacy he gave to chewing his cigar.

His lunch with Boehm, several talks at the main office of the *Humanité*, a few urgent messages Richardley had asked him to deliver personally on reaching Paris, then, in the evening, a Socialist gathering at Levallois in honour of Boehm (at which, in a short speech, he gave an account of what he knew of the riots in St. Petersburg), so thoroughly engrossed Jacques's mind during that first day that he had little occasion to think about the Fontanins. Two or three times, however, the idea did occur to him of ringing up the hospital in the Boulevard Bineau and inquiring whether Jerome was still alive. But would they have given him the desired information without asking him in the first place who he was? Better not make the attempt. He had rather not call attention to the fact that he was in Paris. The last thing at night, however, when he was back in his little room in the Quai de la Tournelle, he had to admit, before falling

asleep, that, far from feeling his mind at rest, his self-imposed ignorance worried him even more than any definite tidings could have done.

And as he woke up on Friday morning, he was half tempted to ring up Antoine. "But what's the use? It's no concern of mine," he said to himself, looking at his watch. "Seven-twenty! If I'm to get in touch with him before he's off to the hospital, I've just about time as it is!" And without more ado he jumped out of bed.

Antoine was greatly surprised at hearing his brother's voice. He told Jacques that M. de Fontanin's death had taken place that very night, after he had lingered on for three days without recovering consciousness. "The funeral takes place on Saturday—tomorrow. Will you still be in Paris then? Daniel," he went on, "never stirs from the hospital; you're sure to find him there at any time." Antoine seemed quite certain of his brother's wish to meet Daniel again. "Come and have lunch with me," he suggested.

Jacques turned away from the phone with an impatient shrug and hung up the receiver.

On the twenty-fourth, the papers briefly reported the delivery of an Austrian note to Servia. Most of them, indeed, abstained—no doubt by order—from offering any comment whatsoever.

Jaurés had chosen the Russian strikes as the subject of his leading article. He wrote in a markedly serious vein.

"What a warning for the European powers!" he began. "Revolution brewing on every hand. Rash indeed would be the Tsar, were he to start a European war or permit one to be started. Nor would the Austro-Hungarian monarchy be one whit less foolhardy, were it persuaded by the blind passions of its clerical and military supporters into making an irremediable breach with Servia. An ominous chapter has been added to the tale of M. Poincaré's visit by the shedding of the Russian workmen's blood, and the tragic warning it affords."

The staff of the *Humanité* were in no doubt as to the tone of the note; it certainly was of a peremptory character and the worst was to be feared. Their nerves were all on edge as they waited for Jaurés to return. The Skipper had suddenly decided that morning to call in person at the Quai d'Orsay and see M. Bienvenu-Martin, acting Foreign Minister during the absence of M. Viviani.

There was a certain amount of confusion among the subeditors. They anxiously wondered how the European nations would react. A pessimist by nature, Gallot maintained that the news received that evening from Germany and Italy justified the fear that in both these countries the man in the street, the press, and even certain members of the parties of the left rather approved the step that Austria had taken. Stefany agreed with Jaurés that in Berlin the indignation of the Social-Democratic parties would find expression in action of a forcible nature and calculated to have far-reaching effects not only in Germany but beyond the German borders.

At noon the offices became empty. It was Stefany's turn to be on duty during the lunch hour, and Jacques offered to keep him company so as to have a chance of studying the file relating to the meeting of the International Committee to be held the following week at Brussels. All nursed high hopes in connexion with this extraordinary meeting. Stefany knew for a fact that Vaillant, Keir Hardie, and several other Party leaders intended to include in their programme the proposal for a general strike in case of war. How would this drastic measure be received by the Socialists of other countries, particularly English and German Socialists?

At one o'clock Jaurés had not yet turned up, and Jacques went down to have a drink at the Café du Croissant, where he thought the Skipper might be lunching. But he was not there.

Jacques was looking round for an empty corner when he was hailed by a young German, Kirchenblatt by name, whom he had first met in Berlin and subsequently in Geneva on several occasions. Kirchenblatt was having lunch with a friend and insisted on Jacques's joining them. His friend was also a German, a man called Wachs, whom Jacques did not know.

The two were strangely different. "They're fairly representative of two characteristic types of East Germans," Jacques thought, "the *leader* and the *led*."

Wachs had been an ironworker in his youth. He looked about forty years old—a man with heavy, vaguely Slavic features, wide cheekbones, a forthright mouth, and limpid eyes, solemn and purposeful to a degree. He kept his big fingers splayed, like tools laid ready for instant use. He listened to what was being said, nodding approval, but was himself sparing of words. His whole deportment indicated a soul at peace with itself, steadfast courage, reliability, love of discipline, and instinctive loyalty.

Kirchenblatt was a much younger man. The shape of his small round head, perched on a scraggy neck, brought to mind the skull of a bird. His cheekbones, in contrast with Wachs's, were not wide but jutted out sharply under each eye. Usually serious and watchful, his face lit up at times in a somewhat disquieting smile, a smile which spread out to the corners of his mouth, pursed his eyelids, and curled back his lips over his teeth. At such moments a glow of rather cruel sensuality would kindle in his eyes. He reminded Jacques of certain fierce Alsatian dogs which show their fangs when at play. He was a native of East Prussia, the son of a Herr Professor—one of those cultured, Nietzschean Germans whom Jacques had frequently met in advanced German circles. For them laws were non-existent. A peculiar sense of honour, a certain chivalrous romanticism, and a taste for lawless, dangerous living, bound such men together in a sort of higher caste, deeply conscious of its aristocratic character. In open rebellion against a social order to which, after all, he was indebted for his mental training, Kirchenblatt lived on the fringe of the international revolutionary parties, being temperamentally too much of an anarchist to adhere unreservedly to socialism, yet balking by instinct both at the levelling theories of democracy and at the feudal privileges surviving in imperial Germany.

The conversation, which was held in German because Wachs had some difficulty in understanding French, turned at once on Berlin's attitude toward the policy of Austria. Kirchenblatt appeared to be well informed regarding the frame of mind of the high officials of the German Empire. He had just heard that the Kaiser's brother, Prince Heinrich, had been sent to London on a special mission to the King of England, a semi-official move which, coming at such a time, seemed to imply that Wilhelm II was personally desirous of winning over George V to his own views about the Austro-Servian dispute.

"What views?" Jacques wanted to know. "That's the whole point. To what extent does blackmail enter into the attitude of the imperial government? Trautenbach, whom I met in Geneva, claims to have it on reliable authority that the Kaiser himself refuses to contemplate the possibility of war. And yet it seems unthinkable that Vienna should take so bold a line without being sure of Germany's support."

"Yes," Kirchenblatt agreed, "it does seem likely, as far as I can judge, that Kaiser Wilhelm agrees to and approves of the principle underlying the Austrian claims; and even that he's egging Vienna on to act as rapidly as possible, so as to confront Europe with a *fait accompli*. Which, after all, is first-rate pacifism." Then, with a sardonic smile: "Why, certainly! For isn't that the best way of preventing any reaction on the part of Russia—to hasten on an Austro-Servian war with a view to saving the peace of Europe?" Then,

sobering up suddenly: “But it’s clear, on the other hand, that the Kaiser, advised as he is, has duly weighed the risks—the risk of a peremptory ‘No’ from Russia, the risk of a general war. Only there’s this to be said, he must consider that risk as practically negligible. Is he right? That’s the whole question.” His features settled again into a Mephistophelian grin. “Just now, I see the Kaiser as a poker-player holding good cards and having to deal with faint-hearted opponents. Of course the possibility has occurred to him that he may lose, by a stroke of ill-luck. In any game somebody has got to lose. But, then, his cards are pretty good—and why should a man dread a stroke of ill-luck to the point of throwing in an excellent hand?”

It was easy to tell, by his caustic tone and dare-devil smile, that Kirchenblatt knew from personal experience what it is to hold good cards and back one’s luck—with the sky the limit!

# Chapter V

AT DAWN, as was the custom at the hospital, the body of Jerome de Fontanin had been placed in its coffin. Immediately after, it had been removed to the special building at the far end of the garden in which the rules of the establishment ordained dead patients should await their obsequies—as far as possible from the living patients.

Mme. de Fontanin, who during her husband's long death-agony had hardly left his bedside for a moment, was sitting in the cell-like basement room to which the body had been relegated. She was alone, having just sent Jenny to their apartment in the Avenue de l'Observatoire to fetch the black dresses both would need for the funeral next day. After escorting his sister to the gate, Daniel had lingered on in the garden, smoking a cigarette.

Sitting in a cane chair under the solitary window, through which a cavernous light entered the little mortuary, Mme. de Fontanin was schooling herself to face the daylong vigil beside the dead. She had her back to the light and her eyes were fixed on the plain deal coffin resting on two black trestles in the middle of the room. The only outer sign of the dead man's identity was a small brass plate inscribed:

Jerome-Elie de Fontanin,
May 11, 1857-July 23, 1914

She was feeling calm, composed—safe in God's keeping. The mental stress of that first night, that momentary weakness which the violence of the shock indeed excused, had passed away. Bereavement had lost its sting; all she now felt was a pensive melancholy. She was so used to living in secure communion with the Force that governs universal life, with that great All into which each of us, when his brief hour is done, must merge his personality, that death's aspect had no terrors for her. Even as a girl she had gazed at her father's corpse without any consternation; not for a moment had she doubted that the spiritual presence of him whom she had venerated, who had been her daily guide, would still befriend her after his body had returned to dust. And time had proved her right; never had she lacked his guidance—as yet again the happenings of the past week had demonstrated. Beyond the grave he had ever been closely associated with her life and struggles, had steered her through perplexities and inspired her decisions.

Thus, today, she could not look on Jerome's death as an ending. Nothing dies, but all things change and are transformed—as season follows season. Gazing at the coffin sealed for ever on her husband's mortal form, she felt a quiet ecstasy, like the feeling that came over her each autumn when, in her garden at Maisons, she watched the leaves she had seen burgeoning in the spring fall one by one, each in its due hour, well knowing that their fall meant no impairment of the vital forces latent in the trunk, that its life impulse was intact as ever. For her, death was but an incident of life, and to contemplate without alarm that ineluctable return to the endless cycle of existence was a way of humbly sharing in God's inscrutable design.

In the sepulchral coolness of the air hovered the sweet, rather cloying perfume of the roses placed by Jenny on the coffin. Unthinkingly Mme. de Fontanin was rubbing the nails of her right hand on her left palm. She had formed the habit, when she had finished dressing in the morning, of sitting for some minutes at her window and, as she polished her nails, communing with herself before entering on the new day; this she called her morning prayer. This habit had developed in her an associative reflex between the act of polishing her nails and invoking guidance from Above.

So long as Jerome lived, estranged from her though he might be, she had nursed a secret hope that one day her great, all-enduring love would enter into its reward on earth—that Jerome would come back to her repentant and reformed. And then, perhaps, it would be granted them to spend their lives' decline in close reunion, forgetting all the past. The folly of those years of waiting she recognized only now—now that all hope was lost for ever. Yet the mental agony she had endured was still too fresh in her mind for her not to feel a certain relief in knowing that at last the burden was lifted. Death had dried up that one bitter spring which for so many years had been poisoning her life. It was as if involuntarily she were holding her head high again after a long spell of bondage—a very human and legitimate feeling, the newfound charm of which unknowingly she relished. It would have abashed her, had she been aware of it, but such was the blindness of her faith that she could not direct a truly penetrating glance into the secret places of her heart. She took for divine grace what was the effect of purely self-regarding instinct, and thanked God for according her such peace of mind and resignation. Thus she could yield herself without remorse to her feeling of infinite relief.

She yielded herself to it all the more readily, since this day of watching beside her dead was for her no more than a breathing-space before a spell of strenuous activity. Tomorrow, Saturday, there was the funeral, then the return home and Daniel's departure. After that, on Sunday, would begin the urgent, arduous task of saving the honour of her children's name. She had determined to investigate her husband's affairs on the spot, in Trieste and in Vienna. Neither Jenny nor Daniel had yet been informed of this intention. Guessing that her son would be against it, she preferred to postpone a fruitless argument; for her mind was made up. The Spirit had inspired her with this audacious project; of that she was assured. Did she not feel within her, every time her thoughts turned to it, that peculiar psychic thrill which she knew well, a supernormal impulse, brooking no denial, that evidenced divine behest?

She decided to leave for Austria on Sunday if possible, or Monday at the latest. She would stay there a fortnight or three weeks; if necessary, the whole of August. She would have an interview with the Official Receiver, and thresh things out with the directors of the company in liquidation. Failure was out of the question, provided she were on the spot and could bring her personal influence to bear. In this respect, indeed, her intuition was not at fault; time and time again, in difficult circumstances, she had been given to see her power. But naturally it never crossed her mind that this power might be ascribed to personal charm. She saw in it nothing else than a divine interposition, and in herself merely a vehicle of the Immanent Will.

She had another delicate task to carry out in Vienna; she desired to get in touch with the girl named Wilhelmina, some letters from whom she had found in Jerome's luggage—childish, affectionate letters which had deeply touched her.

It was only after she had closed the eyes of her dead husband that she had brought herself to go through his luggage. She had done this during the previous night at an hour when she could count on being left to herself, for she wished to keep from the children their father's secrets, up to the end. What had taken longest was getting together the various letters and other documents scattered haphazard among his effects. For a whole hour she had handled the dead man's personal belongings, at once luxurious and shabby, the jetsam of a life: frayed silk shirts, well-cut suits worn threadbare, still fragrant with the cool, exotic, bitter-sweet perfume—of citron, lavender, and cuscus-grass—to which Jerome had been faithful for thirty years and which had never failed to thrill her like a caress. Unpaid bills trailed everywhere, even in the boot-trays and dressing-case: statements of account from banks and confectioners, from shoemakers and florists, from jewellers and doctors—and some quite unlooked-for bills, one from a Bond Street Chinese pedicure, another from a goldsmith's in the Rue de la Paix for a lady's silver-gilt toilet-case. A pawn-ticket issued at Trieste recorded the deposit, for a preposterously low sum, of one pearl tie-pin and one furlined coat with sealskin collar. In a wallet stamped with a count's coronet the photographs of Mme. de Fontanin, of Daniel and Jenny, were stowed alongside a set of photographs, with dedications, of a Viennese opera-singer. And finally, hidden away in a sheaf of German magazines with licentious illustrations, Mme. de Fontanin found to her surprise a well-thumbed pocket Bible printed on India paper… . She effaced everything from her memory—except the little Bible. How often, in the course of their heart-rending "explanations," when Jerome was condoning his misdeeds with his usual virtuosity, had he exclaimed: "You judge me too harshly, sweetheart! I'm not so bad as you think." It was true. Only the Spirit knows the truth of human hearts, by what detours and for what necessary ends God's creatures slowly climb toward perfection.

Misted with tears, her eyes rested on the coffin, the roses with their petals falling one by one.

"Yes," she whispered passionately. "Yes, indeed there was a soul of goodness in you, Jerome dear."

She was roused from her musings by the arrival of Nicole Héquet, accompanied by Daniel.

Nicole was looking her best; her mourning frock showed off the pink-and-white freshness of her skin. The sparkle in her eyes, her arching eyebrows, always made her seem in eager haste to proffer her young beauty. She bent and kissed her aunt; Mme. de Fontanin was grateful to her for respecting the silence of the death-chamber, refraining from the commonplaces of condolence. Nicole went up to the coffin and halted before it, her arms drooping and her hands clasped. Watching her, Mme. de Fontanin wondered if she were praying or lost in memories of her childhood, in which her uncle Jerome had bulked so large and in which she had known such agonies of shame. After some moments of this enigmatic immobility, she returned to her aunt, kissed her again on the forehead, and left the room, followed by Daniel, who had remained standing behind his mother.

When they were outside, Nicole stopped and looked at Daniel. 'What time tomorrow?"

"We start from here at eleven, and go straight to the cemetery."

They were alone in the semi-darkness of the hall. Before them stretched the sunlit garden; convalescent patients, clad in light dressing-gowns, were reclining in deck-chairs along the borders of the lawns. In the warm, windless radiance of the July afternoon, in this golden air, summer seemed installed for ever.

"Pastor Gregory," Daniel went on, "will say a short prayer at the graveside. Mamma was against any sort of funeral ceremony."

"How splendid Aunt Thérèse is!" she whispered. "So brave and calm. Just perfect—as she always is."

He thanked her with a friendly smile. Though the childishness had left her eyes, the blue irises still had their crystal-clear purity and the gentle languor which in the past had stirred him so profoundly.

"What ages it is since I saw you last!" he exclaimed, and added: "Tell me, Nico, are you happy?"

Nicole's gaze, which had been fixed on the bright-green vistas of the garden, seemed to traverse a great distance before settling on Daniel. A look of distress crossed her face; he fancied her on the brink of tears.

"Of course," he murmured awkwardly. "You, too, poor little Nico, you've had more than your share of troubles."

Only then did he notice how much she had changed. The lower part of her face had thickened. Under the discreet makeup, behind the artificial pinkness of the cheeks, he had a glimpse of features that had lost something of their freshness, seemed a little worn.

"Still, Nico, you're young, you have your life before you; you should be happy."

"Happy?" she repeated, with a dubious shrug of her shoulders.

He gazed at her in surprise. "Why, of course! Why shouldn't you be happy?"

Again her gaze was lingering on the sunlit lawns. After a silent moment, without turning her eyes, she said: "Life's strange, isn't it? I'm only twenty-five and I feel so old already." She hesitated, then added: "And so lonely."

"Lonely?"

"Yes." Her eyes were still fixed on the distant scene. "My mother, my girlhood—it all seems far, far away. I've no child. And—I can never have one now; that's all over." Her voice was soft, resigned.

"Anyhow, you have your husband," Daniel ventured to remind her.

"Yes, I've my husband. We have a deep, dependable love for each other. He's kind and understanding. He does all he can to make my life agreeable."

Daniel kept silent.

She moved aside to the wall and leaned against it. When she spoke again, without raising her voice, stiffening up a little, it seemed as if she were nerving herself to say everything, quite simply, without shirking the truth.

"But why deny it? After all, you know, Felix and I haven't so very much in common. He's thirteen years older than I am; he has never treated me as an equal. Anyhow, he has toward all women a paternal, rather condescending attitude, the same that he has toward his patients."

A picture of Héquet rose in Daniel's mind, Héquet with his grey temples, fretted by tiny wrinkles, his keen near-sighted stare, his quiet, precise, unbending manner. Why had he married Nicole? Was it as a man picks a flower he fancies on the wayside? Or, more probably, was it not a desire to graft upon his work-filled life a little of that youth, that natural charm, which doubtless he had always lacked?

"And don't forget," Nicole continued, "that he has his own life, a busy surgeon's life. You know what that means. He's at the beck and call of others from morn till night. Oftener than not, he doesn't have his meals at the same time as I do. As a matter of fact it's better so; we haven't much to say to each other, nothing to share, not a single taste in common, not a memory, nothing! Oh, no, we never quarrel—never the slightest tiff!" She laughed. "For one thing, the moment he expresses a desire, whatever it may be, I say

'Yes.' As a matter of course. His wishes are my law." The laugh had left her lips, and she said with curious slowness: "I'm so utterly indifferent—to everything!"

Gradually she had moved away from the wall toward the door. Lost in thought, she walked down the short flight of steps. Daniel followed in silence. With a free, spontaneous movement, she swung round and faced him, smiling. "I must tell you a little story… . Last winter he had some new bookcases made for our morning-room, and we decided to get rid of a little mahogany desk for which there wasn't any room. It had been my mother's—but that was all the same to me; I've nothing of my own, I'm not attached to anything. Only that desk had to be emptied out, and it was full of letters and things I'd never seen before. I found a heap of letters Father and Mother had written to each other, letters from my grandmother and family friends, old account-books, wedding-cards, and so forth. A scrap-heap of the past, dead memories of Paris, Royat, Biarritz. Old things, old events, old people, all dead and forgotten. I read every line before I threw the lot into the fire. And I cried over it for a fortnight." She laughed again. "A fortnight, a whole delicious fortnight! Felix hadn't an inkling—anyhow, he wouldn't have understood. He doesn't know a thing about me or my childhood or my thoughts."

They were strolling slowly across the garden. As they walked by a group of patients, she dropped her voice.

"My present life—well, I can manage; but sometimes I dread the future. As things are, you see, the days are pretty full for each of us. My husband has his hospital, his practice, the daily round. And I've heaps of things to do, people to see, and so on. I've taken up my violin again and I play a bit of music with my friends. We dine out several times a week; we've got to mix in society on account of my husband's position. But how will it be later on, when he's retired from practice? When we stop going out at night? That's what terrifies me. What's to become of us when we're a couple of old people who've got to spend whole evenings facing each other in front of the fire?"

"My poor dear Nico," Daniel said gravely, "what you've just been telling me distresses me beyond measure."

She broke into a peal of laughter, a gay, quite unexpected echo of her youthful self. "How absurd you are!" she laughed. "I'm not complaining. That's the way life is. It's not a bit better for other women. In fact, I count myself among the lucky ones. No, it's only this: when one's little, one imagines all sorts of silliness, one expects life to work out like a fairytale …"

They were near the gates.

"I'm awfully glad to have seen you," she said. "You look splendid in your uniform. When does your military service end?"

"In October."

"So soon?"

He laughed. "So the time seemed short to you?"

She had halted. A shower of splintered sunbeams was falling on her face, flecking her hair with the pale translucencies of yellow tortoise-shell.

"*Au revoir*," She held out her hand with frank, spontaneous affection. "Mind you tell Jenny how awfully sorry I was to have missed her. Anyhow, next winter, when you're back in Paris, you must come and look me up now and then. A charity visit, you know. We can have a good talk about old times and play at being old cronies raking up the ashes of the past, can't we? It's curious how, as I grow older, I get more and more attached to the past. You'll come, then? It's a promise?"

For a moment he peered intently into her eyes, attractive eyes, a little overlarge, too round, but crystal-clear.

"It's a promise," he said gravely.

# Chapter VI

IT WAS the first time since Sunday that Jenny had set foot outside the hospital; the most she had done was to take a short daily stroll with Daniel in the grounds. In death's proximity she had lived through those four interminable days like a phantom lost among the living, and everything happening round her had seemed meaningless, irrelevant. And when her brother had seen her into a taxi, once she knew that she was alone in the sunbright street, she could not repress a feeling of deliverance. But before the car had reached the outskirts of Paris, she grew aware that the vague distress which had been gnawing at her heart for four days past had returned to her. Indeed, it seemed as if that distress, free now of the restraint imposed by the presence of others at the hospital, had, in her solitude, acquired a sudden, terrifying intensity.

It was one o'clock when she alighted from the taxi at her door. Cutting as short as possible the concierge's voluble condolence, she ran upstairs to the apartment.

In it disorder reigned; doors stood wide open as if the occupants had fled in panic. The garments tossed onto the bed, the shoes lying on the carpet, and the open drawers in Mme. de Fontanin's room gave an impression that burglars had ransacked it. The little table on which the two women, who had done without a servant for two years past, took their hasty meals was still strewn with the remains of their interrupted dinner. All that, Jenny reflected, had to be tidied up; she must see to it that next day, on returning from the cemetery, her mother should not find the apartment in this shocking chaos, an all-too-vivid reminder of the dreadful moments she had lived through here on that tragic Sunday evening.

Feeling oppressed, uncertain where to begin, Jenny went to her bedroom. Evidently she had forgotten to shut her window when she left; a sudden shower during the previous night had drenched the floor, and a gust of wind had scattered the letters on her desk, upset a vase, stripped the petals off a bunch of roses.

As she slowly removed her gloves, gazing at the havoc round her, she tried to pull herself together. Her mother had given her detailed instructions. From the desk she was to get the key of the store-room at the far end of the apartment, hunt through the boxes in it, and search in the wardrobe till she found two mourning shawls and crape veils. Mechanically she took from its peg the smock she wore for housework in the mornings and slipped it on. But then her strength failed her; she stumbled to the bed and sat down on it. The silence of the apartment seemed to weigh on her shoulders.

"What can it be that's making me so tired?" she prevaricated with herself. A week ago she had been moving briskly to and fro in these same rooms, sped by the impetus of life. Less than a week—four days ago. Had four days been enough to shatter the peace of mind she had so dearly won?

She sat crouching forward as if under a dead weight. Tears would have been a solace, but she had always been denied that anodyne of weaklings. Even when she was a little girl, her sorrows had been tearless, arid, reticent. Dry-eyed, she set her gaze roaming over the papers lying on the floor, the ornaments on the mantelpiece, until it came to rest on the mirror, held by the dazzling sheen reflected from the sunlit sky. And suddenly in the silvery haze, for a spellbound second, the face of Jacques took form. She rose hastily, closed shutters and window, gathered up the flowers and letters, and went out into the passage.

The air in the store-room was stifling. The heat intensified its smell of dust, wool, camphor, and old newspapers toasting in the sun. With an effort she climbed onto a stool and opened the high-pitched window. With the fresh air, harsh light poured into the narrow room, bringing out the forlorn ugliness of the objects piled within it: empty trunks, discarded bedding, oil-lamps, schoolbooks, cardboard boxes smeared with patches of grey dust and speckled with dead flies. To get to the corner in which the trunks were stacked, she had to shift bodily a dressmaker's dummy bonneted with an antiquated lampshade whose spangled flounces were held up by bunches of artificial violets. For a moment, gazing at this portentous work of needlecraft which, throughout her childhood, had lorded it on the drawing-room piano, she gave way to sentimental memories. Then she set manfully to work, opening boxes, rummaging in drawers, carefully replacing naphthalene sachets the pungency of which stung her nostrils and made her feel sick. Half fainting, bathed in sweat, humiliated by her languor and struggling against it, she doggedly kept to her task—at least it saved her from her thoughts.

Then, like a sudden shaft of light rending the gloom, an idea, definite if but vaguely formulated, struck on her consciousness at its most sensitive point and brought her to a stop. "Nothing is ever hopeless; everything is always possible." Yes, after all, she was young, and before her lay the best part of life, uncharted, teeming with possibilities.

And what she was glimpsing now behind these commonplaces was something so amazing, so alarming, that it left her dazed. It had flashed on her that if after Jacques's desertion she had managed to recover and regain her self-control, this was only because she had then been fortunate enough to banish utterly the faintest hope… .

"Am I," she wondered, "beginning to hope again?"

So affirmative was the unspoken answer that a tremor shook her body and she had to lean against the wardrobe to steady herself. For some minutes she stayed unmoving in a trancelike coma, her eyes closed, all but stunned into insensibility. Vivid as in dreams, a pageant of the past sped before her eyes; Jacques, at Maisons, sitting beside her after a game of tennis—she distinctly saw the tiny beads of sweat standing out on his forehead; Jacques walking beside her along the forest road after they had seen the old dog run over outside a garage—she heard his anxious question: "Do you often think about death?"; Jacques at the little garden-gate kissing her shadow on the moonlit wall—she heard his footfalls on the grass as he fled into the darkness… . She was still leaning against the wardrobe, shivering despite the heat. Within her reigned a deep, fantastic silence, and the rumble of the city drifting in through the high window came from far away, from another world. How was she to quell that insensate yearning to be happy which her meeting with Jacques had revived four days ago? She was beginning another illness, one that would last indefinitely—only too well she knew it. And this time there would be no return to health, for she would no longer have the wish for it.

Being alone, always alone, was hardest to bear. True, Daniel had been all attention to her while they had been together at Neuilly. Only that morning, while they were breakfasting together in the public dining-room at the hospital, he had taken her hand, struck perhaps by her listlessness, and murmured with an earnest look: "What's the trouble, Jenny darling?" She had shaken her head

evasively, withdrawn her hand. It had always been a bitter grief to her that, loving her big brother so intensely, she had never found anything to say to him, anything that might have levelled once for all the barriers that life, their characters, perhaps their very kinship, had set up between them. No, there was no one in whom she could confide. No one ever had really listened to her, understood. No one ever would be able to understand her. No one? *He*, perhaps. Perhaps some day … Deep down in her a small, secret voice whispered: "My Jacques!" A blush mantled her cheeks.

She felt worn out, aching in every limb. A glass of cold water might do her good.

With blind, groping steps, steadying herself against the wall, she made her way to the kitchen. The water from the tap seemed to her ice-cold. Dipping her hands in a basin, she dabbed her eyes and forehead. Her strength was gradually returning; she need only wait a while… . Opening the window, she rested her elbows on the sill. Golden heat-haze, like a drift of dancing atoms, shimmered on the roofs. In the Luxembourg station a locomotive was whistling forlornly. How often during the last few weeks, on afternoons like this, had she gazed out of that window while she waited for the tea-kettle to boil! Then she had been almost gay, humming a cheerful tune. And suddenly her heart grew faint with longing to be that Jenny of last spring, the convalescent girl who had recovered peace.

In a whisper she asked herself: "How shall I ever find the courage to face tomorrow, all the tomorrows coming after?" But the words that rose to her lips conveyed only a conventional idea; they did not express the real truth, her inmost feeling. For now she had regained hope, she accepted suffering, too. And suddenly this girl who never smiled felt and perceived clearly, as if she had been looking in a mirror, a small, uncertain smile rippling on her lips.

# Chapter VII

SEVERAL times in the afternoon, and even during his lunch with the two Germans, Jacques had asked himself: Would he go to see Daniel? And each time his answer had been: "Certainly not. Why should I?"

Nevertheless, after leaving the restaurant with Kirchenblatt, as he was crossing the square in front of the Bourse and walking past the Métro station, is suddenly occurred to him that it was only three, and the meeting he meant to attend did not begin till five. "This would have been just the moment," he reflected, "to look in at the hospital—if I'd wanted to." He halted, of two minds. "Anyhow, once it's over, I'll stop thinking about it." His mind made up, he left the German abruptly, ran down the steps, and took the subway to Neuilly.

At the entrance of the hospital he found Victor, his brother's chauffeur, standing beside the car, smoking a cigarette. That meant that Antoine would be present at the interview. So much the better!

But, as he was entering the grounds, he saw his brother approaching. "If you'd come a bit earlier, I'd have given you a lift back. I can't wait now. Look here, how about dining with me tonight? No? Well—when?"

Jacques ignored the questions. "How can I manage to see Daniel—alone?" he asked.

"Quite simple. Mme. de Fontanin is staying in the mortuary, and Jenny's away."

"Away?"

"See that grey roof behind the trees? That's the mortuary building. Daniel's there. The attendant will tell him you've come."

"So Jenny's not here today?"

"No. Her mother's sent her to fetch some things from their place in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. Are you staying long in Paris? … You'll give me a ring, eh?"

He hurried out of the gate and sprang into the car.

Jacques walked on toward the mortuary. Suddenly he slowed down. A fantastic scheme had crossed his mind. Turning on his heel, he walked back to the entrance-gate and hailed a taxi.

"To the Avenue de l'Observatoire," he said. "Quickly!"

He stared obstinately at the trees, the passers-by, the traffic—anything to keep himself from thinking! For he knew that if he allowed himself a moment's thought he would abandon this absurd project to which, despite himself, some secret voice within was fervently impelling him. Once there, what should he do? He had no notion. Or, rather, this: justify himself, cease being the only one to bear the blame. Yes, their misunderstandings must be cleared up, once for all, by plenary explanation.

He had the cab stop at the Luxembourg Gardens, then made his way on foot, almost at a run, forcing himself not to look up at that balcony, those windows, which so often in old days he had come here to gaze at from afar. He dived into the building and was past the concierge's room in a flash; he feared Jenny might have given orders to say she was not at home.

Nothing had changed. These were the stairs he had climbed so often, chatting with Daniel—a Daniel in knickerbockers with his schoolbooks under his arm; up there was the landing where he had seen Mme. de Fontanin for the first time, on the night of his return from Marseille; from there she had bent down toward the two young truants with no reproach but a grave smile. Nothing had changed, not even the doorbell of the apartment whose tinkle faintly echoed in the background of his memory.

In a moment she would be there. What was he to say to her?

His fingers clenched on the banister, he bent forward, listening. Not a sound behind the door; no footstep. What could she be doing?

After waiting for some minutes he rang the bell a second time, less boldly.

Silence again.

Then hurriedly he ran downstairs and called to the concierge.

"Miss Jenny's in, isn't she?"

"No. Did you know, sir, that poor M. de Fontanin…?"

"Yes. And I know, too, that Miss Jenny's in the apartment. I've an urgent message for her."

"Well, sir, she did come after lunch, but she's gone now. I saw her going out a good quarter of an hour ago."

"So that's it. She's left already." Dully he stared at the old woman. He could not have defined his feelings; were they of vast relief or bitter disappointment?

The meeting in the Rue de Vaugirard did not start till five. Would he really attend it? He had lost all desire to do so. For the first time the shadow of a purely personal interest fell between him and his militant career.

Suddenly he came to a decision: he would go back to Neuilly. If Jenny had things to do on the way back, he could reach the hospital before her, await her at the entrance, and then …! An absurd, foolhardy plan—but anything was better than tamely to accept defeat.

Chance outwitted him. As he alighted from the tram in front of the hospital and was wondering what move to make, someone behind called his name.

Daniel, who had been waiting for a tram in the other direction, had seen him and was crossing the road.

"You, Jacques?" He seemed absolutely thunderstruck. "So you're still in Paris?"

"I got back yesterday," Jacques said uncomfortably. "Antoine has told me—what happened."

"He died without regaining consciousness," Daniel said tersely. He seemed still more embarrassed than Jacques, almost put out by their meeting.

"I've an appointment I absolutely can't put off," Daniel went on. "I'm going to sell some pictures to Ludwigson, as we need the money; and I'm meeting him at my studio this afternoon. If I'd had a notion you'd be coming to see me … What's to be done? Look here, why shouldn't you come along with me? We can have a quiet talk in my studio before Ludwigson turns up."

"Right!" Jacques suddenly abandoned all his plans.

Daniel beamed with gratitude. “We can walk a bit of the way, and take a taxi at the Fortifications.”

The spacious vista of the boulevard before them sweltered in dazzling light, but the tree-shaded pavement promised well for walking. Daniel looked at once heroic and grotesque in his flashing helmet with the horse-tail floating from it; flapping against his breeches, rapping his spurs, his sword accompanied each footfall with a martial clank. Haunted by premonitions of a war, Jacques heard his friend’s explanations with an inattentive ear. He was always on the brink of interrupting, gripping Daniel’s arm, exclaiming: “But, damn it, don’t you realize what’s threatening you?” Then a monstrous notion flashed through his mind, bereft him of speech. Supposing by some tragic chance the efforts of the internationalists proved unavailing, the handsome young dragoon beside him, back in service on the Lorraine frontier, would surely fall on the first day. His heart missed a beat; the words he had meant to say stuck in his throat.

Meanwhile Daniel was chattering away. “Ludwigson said to me: ‘Round about five,’ but I’d like to sort out the pictures before he comes. You see, it’s up to me to save the situation; my father’s left us nothing but his debts.”

He gave a jarring laugh. That laugh, his volubility, the jerkiness of his speech, betrayed a nervous state unusual with him. It was due to various circumstances: the shock of seeing Jacques again, distressing memories of their first encounter, and his eagerness to bring back to their conversation its bygone note of intimacy and break down his friend’s reserve by a free exchange of confidences. Added to this was the exhilaration of the radiant summer day, of a walk in the open air after four days’ strict confinement by a deathbed.

So little mindful was Jacques of the fact that dormant somewhere, in his name, was a substantial fortune, that the idea he could come to his friend’s aid never entered his head. Daniel, too, had forgotten it; otherwise he would not have breathed a word of his financial straits.

“Debts—and a dishonoured name!” Daniel’s voice was gloomy. “Yes, he’ll have poisoned our lives right up to the end. Only this morning I opened a letter written to him by some girl in England to whom he’d promised money. He was travelling to and fro between London and Vienna, and he kept a woman at each end. Like a sailor with a girl in every port! Don’t imagine,” he added hastily, “that I care a damn about his—his propensities; it’s all the rest that is so rotten.”

Jacques gave an evasive nod.

“Do you wonder why I talk like that?” Daniel went on. “I’ve an immense grievance against my father. Not in the least on account of his philanderings. If I said, ‘Quite the contrary,’ it would be nearer the truth. Queer, isn’t it? Never once did we talk frankly, familiarly, together—and now he’s dead. But if any intimacy between us had been possible, it would have been on that topic only: women, love-affairs. It’s perhaps because I’m so like him,” he mused aloud, “exactly like him—incapable of holding out against ‘temptations’ of that order, incapable even of feeling a sense of guilt when I’ve given way.” After a slight hesitation he added: “You’re not like that, are you?”

Jacques, too, during the past four years had been apt to yield to such temptations, but never without a sense of guilt. For, lurking in some obscure corner of his personality there remained, though he was not aware of it, a vestige of that puerile discrimination between the “pure” and the “impure” which had cropped up so often in his talks with Daniel.

“No,” he said, “I’ve never had that courage—the courage of accepting oneself as one is.”

“ ‘Courage’? Isn’t it, rather, weakness—or self-conceit? Or anything else you like to call it? I imagine that for characters like mine this running from one passion to another is the normal, necessary course, their natural tempo. One should never hold back from anything that comes one’s way,” he concluded fervently, as if reiterating a pledge made to himself.

Jacques’s eyes lingered appreciatively on the manly, clean-cut outlines of the face beneath the helmet-peak. “Daniel,” he mused, “has the luck of being good-looking. To speak of ‘passion’ with such assurance one needs to be ‘irresistible,’ to be used to find women running after one. Perhaps, too, one needs to have had experiences of a different sort from mine.” It was in the childish embrace of Lisbeth, the young, flaxen-haired Alsatian girl, that he had taken his first lesson in the amorous art. Daniel’s had come when he was younger; his introduction to sensual pleasure had been at the expert hands of the “professional” who had given him shelter at Marseille. Perhaps, Jacques thought, those very different initiations had left their mark for ever. Does the first experience, he wondered, give a permanent bias to one’s personality? Or, on the contrary, is that first experience governed by certain secret affinities to which one will be subject throughout life?

As if he had guessed the turn Jacques’s thoughts had taken, Daniel exclaimed: “It’s appalling, the tendency we have to complicate these problems! What’s love? A matter of health—of physical and mental fitness. Personally, I accept verbatim Iago’s definition—remember?—‘It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will.’ Yes, that’s all love is, and it’s a mistake to think it anything else. An uprush of the vital sap. Iago knew what he was talking about!”

“I see you haven’t lost your habit of quoting English.” Jacques smiled. He had no desire to embark on a discussion of “love.” He glanced at his watch. The telegrams from abroad did not reach the *Humanité* office before four-thirty or five.

Daniel noticed the glance. “Oh, we’ve heaps of time,” he said. “But we can talk better at my place.”

He signalled to a taxi.

On their way, to keep the conversation going, Daniel continued talking about himself and his love-affairs at Luneville and Nancy, vaunting the charms of the short-lived liaison. Suddenly he felt abashed. “You let me go on rattling away, and you just look at me,” he said. “What’s on your mind?”

Jacques gave a slight start. Once again he felt an impulse to plunge into the topic haunting all his thoughts. Once again he shrank from it.

“What’s on my mind? Why—all that!”

During the silence that ensued each was gloomily wondering whether the picture of his friend, so treasured in remembrance, still had any semblance of reality.

“Take the Rue de Seine,” Daniel called to the driver. Turning to Jacques, he added: “It’s just struck me—you’ve not seen my place yet, have you?”

Daniel had rented this studio in the year preceding his military service. Ludwigson was still paying the rent, on the amiable pretext that Daniel used it to store the records of their art review. It was situated on the top floor of an old house with high windows, at the back of a paved courtyard.

Dark, smelly, and decrepit, the old staircase had yet a certain grandeur; it was spacious and adorned with a wrought-iron balustrade. Here and there the steps had caved in. The door of the studio, pierced with a spy-hole like those in prison cells, was opened by Daniel with a massive key which he had procured from the concierge.

Jacques followed his friend into a huge attic room with a sloping ceiling, lit by a large, dust-grimed window. While Daniel bustled about the room, Jacques examined it with interest. The walls were of a uniform neutral grey, without a touch of colour. Two low alcoves, screened by half-drawn curtains, were let into the back wall of the studio; one was painted white and served as a dressing-room; the other, hung with darkred cloth, contained a large, low bed. In a corner stood an architect's trestle-table, piled with books, albums, and magazines; above it hung a green-shaded lamp. Under the slip-covers which Daniel was hastily removing was a collection of easels on casters and chairs of various shapes and sizes. Stowed in a deal canterbury set against the wall were mounted canvases and drawing-blocks, only the edges of which were visible.

Daniel rolled up to Jacques a frayed leather armchair. "Do sit down. I'll wash my hands."

The chair-springs jangled as Jacques sat down. Gazing through the window, he saw a vista of house-roofs bathed in golden light, and recognized the dome of the Institute, the steeples of Saint-Germain-desPrés, the Saint-Sulpice towers.

Glancing back toward the dressing-room, he had a glimpse of Daniel through the gap between the curtains. Daniel had taken off his tunic and put on a pale-blue pyjama coat. Sitting before a looking-glass, he was smoothing his hair with his palms, smilingly observing his reflected self. Jacques was taken aback; he felt as if he had stumbled upon a secret. Daniel was handsome, his profile clean-cut as a cameo, but he always seemed so little conscious of this, and carried his good looks with such manly unaffectedness, that Jacques had never pictured his friend lingering thus complacently before a mirror. Suddenly, as Daniel began walking toward him, the thought of Jenny set him tingling with emotion. Though there was no real likeness between brother and sister, both had inherited from Jerome a characteristic elegance of build, long, lithe limbs which gave an unmistakable resemblance to their ways of walking.

He rose quickly and moved toward the rack containing the canvases.

"No," Daniel said, following him. "That's the dump for my early stuff. The 1911 vintage. Everything I painted that year was full of reminiscences. You remember the cruel remark that Whistler—wasn't it?—made about Burne-Jones: 'It's like something that *might* be quite good,' or words to that effect. Have a look at this, instead." He picked out some canvases all depicting the same nude with slight variations. "I did these just before my military service. It's these studies which have helped me most to understand."

Jacques supposed Daniel had left the phrase unfinished.

"Understand what?" he asked.

"Why, *that*, of course. That back, those shoulders. It's essential, in my opinion, to select some tangible object—that back, for instance—and plod away at it till one begins to discern the truth—the simple, vital truth that is a quality of all solid, eternal things. I believe that when one spares no pains, and studies thoroughly some given object like that back or those shoulders, one ends by lighting on a secret, the solution of everything, a sort of master-key to the universe."

That back, those shoulders! Suddenly Jacques thought of Europe on the brink of war …

"I've always owed everything I've learned," Daniel went on, "to the persistent study of a single model. Why change? You do much better work when you force yourself to come back constantly to the same starting-point, when each time you have to start all over again and go a bit further in the same direction. If I'd been a novelist, I think that, instead of having a new set of characters in each successive book, I'd have always stuck to the same characters, so as to dig a little deeper every time."

Jacques kept hostile silence. How artificial, sterile, inopportune, he deemed such problems of aesthetics! He had lost the power of understanding the aim of such existences as Daniel's. And when he asked himself: "What would they think of him down in Geneva?" he was ashamed of his friend.

Daniel picked up his canvases one by one, held them to the light, and, screwing up his eyes, gave each a rapid glance before putting it back. Now and then he laid one aside, propping it against the legs of the nearest easel. "For Ludwigson."

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he muttered between his teeth: "When all's said and done, talent hardly matters, though of course one can't dispense with it. It's the work one puts in that counts. Talent's a mere skyrocket, if the work isn't put in; it dazzles for a moment, but leaves nothing behind." Regretfully, it seemed, he laid three successive canvases aside. "If only one could never have to sell 'them' anything, and work, *work* all one's life!"

"So you're still as wrapped up as ever in your art?" Jacques's eyes were still fixed on his friend.

Daniel detected the undertone of slightly disdainful wonder in Jacques's voice, and made haste to answer in conciliatory terms. "Well, some are born men of action, I suppose, and some are not!"

Out of prudence he concealed his true opinion, which was that there were quite enough "men of action" in the world already—for all the good mankind got out of them. Indeed, it was in the interests of the community that people like himself and Jacques, whom nature had endowed with gifts enabling them to develop into artists, should leave the field of action to such as had no other. In his eyes Jacques had flagrantly betrayed his natural vocation. And he saw a confirmation of this view in the fretful, uncommunicative attitude of his boyhood friend. This was surely proof of a rankling sense of frustration, the regrets of those who suffer from a vague unawareness that they have not fulfillled their destiny and hide, under a mask of scorn and bravado, an unavowed impression of having played false to themselves.

Jacques's face grew hard. When he spoke again his head was lowered—which made him almost inaudible. "Let me tell you, Daniel, you live locked up in your art, and it's as if you knew nothing of the world of men… ."

Daniel laid aside the picture he was examining. "The world of men?"

"Yes. Of men who lead the lives of illused, tortured animals. So long as one turns a blind eye to all that, perhaps one can behave as you do. But once one has had a view of the sufferings of oppressed humanity, it becomes simply impossible to devote one's life to art. It can't be done. Do you understand me?"

"I do." Daniel's tone was pensive. He went up to the window and gazed some moments at the grey expanse of roofs. "Yes," he was thinking, "of course he's right. The world is full of misery. But what can one do about it? Everything's so hopeless—everything but, precisely, art." And he felt even more appreciative of that marvellous haven in which he had been privileged to cast anchor. "Why should I saddle myself with the sins and sorrows of the world? I'd only paralyse my creative energy, stifle my gifts—without benefit to

anyone. I wasn't born to be an apostle. And then—Jacques may write me down a monster if he chooses—I've always been determined, yes, *determined* to be happy." Indeed, since childhood he had made a point of safeguarding his happiness at all costs, in the belief—naïve maybe, but carefully thought out—that this was his chief duty toward himself. No easy duty, for it involved unremitting vigilance, since, in following the line of least resistance, a man may plunge head first into a sea of troubles. Certainly the prime condition of his happiness was freedom, and he was well aware that devotion to a common cause always involves the sacrifice of freedom… . Since, however, he could not confess as much to Jacques, he had to endure in silence the scornful disapproval he had seen in his friend's eyes.

Turning, he went up to Jacques and gazed at him for some moments questioningly. "It's no use saying you are happy." (Jacques had said nothing of the kind.) "On the contrary, you look sad, terribly worried."

Jacques straightened up. Now, at last, he would speak! It was as if suddenly he had come to a decision too long postponed and the look in his eyes was so earnest that Daniel was dumbfounded.

An imperious ring at the doorbell jarred the air, giving them both a start.

"Ludwigson!" Daniel breathed.

"So much the better," Jacques thought. "For all the good it would have done …!"

"It won't take long," Daniel whispered. "Don't go; I'll walk back with you."

Jacques shook his head.

"Must you really go?"

"Yes." His face was set, expressionless.

Daniel cast him a desperately pleading look; then, conscious that Jacques would not give way, made a gesture of discouragement and hurried to the door.

Ludwigson was wearing a Riviera suit of cream-coloured tusser, close-fitting, with the Légion d'Honneur rosette well in evidence. His immense head looked as if it had been carved in putty; the double chin sat snug upon a very low collar. Ludwigson's skull was pointed, his eyes were rather narrow, his cheeks flat. The wide, thick-lipped mouth brought to mind a rat-trap.

He had evidently counted on discussing prices with Daniel *tête-à-tête*, and showed some surprise at the presence of a third party. Nevertheless, he moved courteously toward Jacques, whom he immediately recognized though he had met him only once.

"Delighted to see you again. I had the pleasure"—he rolled the "r" prodigiously—"of chatting with you four years ago, at the Russian Ballet, during the intermission. Remember it? You were studying then for the Ecole Normale."

"That's right," Jacques replied. "You must have a wonderful memory."

"I have!" Ludwigson's lizardlike eyelids dropped and, as if he wished to confirm Jacques's eulogy, he addressed himself to Daniel. "It's from your friend M. Thibault I learned that in ancient Greece—at Thebes, if I remember rightly—a candidate for a magisterial post had to prove that he hadn't dealt in any form of business for at least ten years. Curious, don't you think so? I've never forgotten it." He turned to Jacques. "I also learned as well from you that night that in France, under the old regime, before he had the right to use his title, a man must have had his—what do you call it?—patent of nobility, for twenty years at least." He added, with a graceful bow: "It's one of my greatest pleasures conversing with well-educated people."

Jacques smiled. Then, to cut things short, he hastily took leave of Ludwigson. Daniel followed him to the door. "Look here, Jacques," he whispered awkwardly, "can't you possibly wait?"

"Can't be done. I'm late already …"

He avoided his friend's eyes; that hideous vision—of Daniel fallen at the front—had come back, wringing his heart.

They shook hands mechanically, flustered by Ludwigson's presence.

Jacques himself opened the heavy door, muttering "*Au revoir*," and ran quickly down the lightless stairs.

In the street he halted, drew a deep breath, and looked at his watch. The Vaugirard meeting was long since over.

He felt hungry. Entering a confectioner's, he bought two *croissants* and a bar of chocolate, then started off on foot toward the Bourse.

# Chapter VIII

THAT Friday evening, July 24, in Gallot's and Stefany's offices at the *Humanité* the talk was pessimistic. Everyone who had been in touch with the Skipper showed signs of anxiety. At the Bourse, a sudden panic had forced down the 3 per cent government bonds to 80, and even—for a short period—to 78 francs. Never since 1871 had the Rente touched so low a level. And German correspondents reported a similar break on the Berlin Stock Exchange.

Jaurés had paid another call at the Quai d'Orsay in the afternoon. He had looked very anxious when he came back, gone straight to his room, shut himself up in it, and remained there working, refusing to see anybody. His feature article for the next morning was ready. The heading alone had transpired, but that heading spoke volumes: "A Last Chance of Peace." To Stefany he had observed: "The tone of the Austrian note is shockingly peremptory. So much so that one's inclined to wonder whether Vienna's aim isn't to bring these things to a head, and thus to make any preventive action on the part of the other powers impossible."

Everything, indeed, would seem to have been fiendishly devised to make confusion worse confounded in Europe. The responsible French leaders were abroad and would not be back in Paris until the thirty-first. They must have heard the news at sea, when crossing from Russia to Sweden, and it was no easy matter for them to consult either with the rest of the French Ministry or with the Allied governments. (Berchtold had arranged things so that the Tsar should not be apprised of the note until after the French President had left the country, fearing, no doubt, that Poincaré's advice would tend to conciliation.) The Kaiser also was away on a cruise and would have some difficulty even if so minded, in promptly urging counsels of moderation upon Franz Josef. Furthermore the Russian strikes, then in full swing, had a paralysing effect on the Russian leaders, much as the civil war in Ireland impeded British action. Lastly, the Servian government had during the last few days been plunged into the turmoil of a general election. Most of the ministers were touring the countryside for electioneering purposes; Prime Minister Pachich was actually away from Belgrade when the Austrian note was handed in.

Definite information was now coming to hand as regards the note itself, which had been received on the Thursday by the Servian government; its terms had been imparted that day to the powers. For all the conciliatory assurances repeatedly given by Austria (Berchtold had explicitly informed the Russian and French ambassadors that the claims put forward would be "most reasonable"), the note was distinctly in the nature of an ultimatum. The Vienna government insisted upon unqualified compliance with its demands and had set a time-limit within which a reply must be forthcoming—an unbelievably short time-limit: forty-eight hours—with a view, it seemed, to preventing the powers from intervening in Servia's favour. A piece of secret information gathered at the Austrian Foreign Office, and forwarded to Jaurés by Hosmer through a Viennese Socialist, justified the worst fears. Baron von Giesl, the Austrian Ambassador in Belgrade, was reported already to have received, along with the order to hand in the note, formal instructions to break off diplomatic relations and leave Servia immediately in the likely event of the Servian government's not having accepted the Austrian demands without discussion by six p.m. on Saturday. These instructions suggested that the ultimatum had been drafted deliberately in provocative and unacceptable terms so as to enable Vienna to speed up a declaration of war. Further information confirmed these discouraging conjectures. Recalled by wire, the Chief of the General Staff, Hôtzendorf, had cut short his holiday in Tirol and hastily returned to the Austrian capital. The German Ambassador to France, Herr von Schoen, on leave at Berchtesgaden, had suddenly returned to Paris. Count Berchtold, after conferring with the Emperor at Ischl, had travelled back via Salzburg so as to meet there the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg.

Thus everything concurred to give the impression of a vast, cleverly organized plot. What was Germany's share in this? German sympathizers cast all the blame on the Russians and accounted for the German attitude by the fact that Germany had suddenly been informed of the disturbing activities of the Pan-Slav camarilla and the extent of the military preparations already under way in Russia. In government circles in Berlin the cue was to feign that until now the German leaders had had no inkling of the Austrian demands and had only learned of them from the communication sent to the rest of the powers. Jagow, the Secretary of State at the Wilhelmstrasse, had, it was said, given the British ambassador a positive assurance to this effect. Yet it was understood that the text of the note had been imparted to Berlin at least two days previously.

Was it to be concluded that Germany was deliberately backing up Austria, that she actually wanted war? Trautenbach, who had just come over from Berlin, and whom Jacques had met that evening in Stefany's office, totally rejected any such superficial interpretation of the facts. Germany's attitude was to be accounted for, in his opinion, by the fact that military circles in Berlin still believed in Russia's unpreparedness. Supposing their calculations to be correct, and supposing the risk of a general conflagration to be non-existent owing to Russia's incapacity to go to war, the Germanic powers could take any risks—and be certain that their adversary would "climb down." It was only a question of prompt and vigorous action. The Austrian troops must be in Belgrade before the powers had time to intervene or even to consult. Germany would then appear on the scene. Guiltless of the least connivance or premeditation, she would offer herself as mediator, with a view to localizing the conflict and settling it by negotiations which she would herself initiate. For the sake of peace, Europe would eagerly accept German arbitration and sacrifice the interests of Servia without much protest. Thanks to Germany, order would be restored and the issue be all to the advantage of the Central Powers. The rule of the Dual Monarchy would be consolidated for a long spell, and the Triple Alliance would score an unparalleled diplomatic triumph. These assumptions as to Germany's secret plans were borne out by certain confidential information gleaned among the familiars of the Italian embassy in Berlin.

Stefany having been sent for by the Skipper, Jacques took Trautenbach to the *Progrès*, close by.

The atmosphere in the little room was stormy. The evening papers, the news passed round by members of the Humanité staff, were giving rise to varied and impassioned comments.

Shortly before nine, there was a sudden revival of hope. Pagès had just spent a few minutes in the Skipper's room and found him in a less gloomy mood. Jaurés had observed: "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. This move of Austria's will oblige the nations of Europe to shake off their torpor." Furthermore, the latest dispatches contained abundant evidence of the efforts being made by the

Socialist International. The Belgian, Italian, German, Austrian, English, and Russian parties were in constant touch with the French section and were preparing for a combined demonstration on a large scale. Hopeful news had just been received from the German Socialists, vouching for the peaceful intentions of their government. If the Social-Democrats were to be believed, neither Bethmann, nor Jagow, least of all the Kaiser, would countenance being involved in war. Thus there was every reason to expect a forceful and effective intervention on the part of Germany.

From Russia, too, comforting news had arrived. On receipt of the Austrian note, at a hurriedly summoned meeting' of the Cabinet presided over by the Tsar, it had been decided to approach the Austrian government immediately with an urgent request for an extension of the time-limit imposed on Servia. This ingenious move, which, without entering into the merits of the case, dealt merely with the secondary issue of the time-limit, might well be favourably considered by Vienna. And any extension, even if only of two or three days, would give a breathing-space to the European statesmen, during which they could agree upon some common line of action. In any case the Russian Foreign Office had lost no time in opening up definite conversations with the several ambassadors accredited to St. Petersburg, which conversations could not fail to bear fruit. Almost at the same time a cable was received from London corroborating the earlier hopeful information. The Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, had taken the initiative in backing up with his full authority the Russian demand for an extension of the time-limit. Furthermore, he was drafting an urgent plan for mediation, with which he meant to associate Germany, Italy, France, and England, the four great powers not directly interested in the conflict. A moderate plan, and one not likely to be rejected, for round the table of this court of arbitration the partners would be evenly balanced—on the one side, Germany and Italy to uphold the interests of Austria; on the other, France and England to represent the interests of Servia and the Slavs.

From eleven o'clock onward, however, evil portents once more darkened the horizon. There was first of all a rumor that, while Germany had agreed to Sir Edward Grey's plan, she had done so in very reticent terms, which seemed to imply she would not join wholeheartedly in the mediatory action of the other powers. Then Marc Levoir came back from the Quai d'Orsay with the news that, contrary to all expectation, Austria had flatly refused Russia's appeal for an extension of the time-limit, which at once struck his hearers as an admission of her aggressive designs.

About one a.m., when most of the militants had left, Jacques came back to the *Humanité* offices.

In the entrance-hall Gallot was showing out two Socialist deputies who had just left the Skipper's room. They were the bearers of a confidential and disquieting piece of information: that very day, while every chancellery was relying on the intervention of Berlin in favour of peace, the German ambassador, Herr von Schoen, who had just come back to Paris, had called on M. Bienvenu-Martin, acting Secretary of State, at the Quai d'Orsay, and read to him a declaration made to him by his government. This surprising document was couched in the curt language of a warning, or even of a threat. Germany coolly declared therein that she approved of both the substance and the form of the Austrian note. She more than hinted that European diplomacy had no business to interfere, that the conflict should properly remain localized as between Austria and Servia, and that "no third power" should intervene in the dispute, "otherwise, the most serious consequences were to be feared." All of which clearly meant: "We are determined to back up Austria; if Russia chooses to intervene in Servia's favour, we shall have to mobilize, and as the system of alliances would automatically come into play, France and Russia would have to face the possibility of a war against the Triple Alliance." This move of von Schoen's seemed to bring suddenly to light a biased, aggressive attitude on the part of German imperialism and a deliberate intention to intimidate all possible opponents. Thus Germany had, more or less overtly, flung down the gauntlet, and the question now was: How would France react?

Gallot and Jacques had remained talking in the entrance-hall and Jacques was just about to leave when a door opened suddenly. Jaurés came out, his forehead beaded with perspiration, his straw hat on the back of his head, his shoulders hunched, his eyes half hidden under his bushy brows. Under his burly arm was tucked a brief-case bulging with papers. He gave the two men a perfunctory glance, replied mechanically to their greeting, strode across the room with a heavy step, and was gone.

# Chapter IX

Mme. DE FONTANIN and Daniel had spent the night sitting beside the coffin. Jenny, at her brother's instance, had left them, to snatch a few hours of sleep.

When she came back it was close to seven. Daniel tapped his mother lightly on the shoulder. "Come, Mamma. Jenny'll stay here while we have a cup of tea." His tone was affectionate but firm. Mme. de Fontanin turned her tired face toward Daniel. She was aware that there was no use resisting. Here was an opportunity, she thought, for letting him know of her plan to go to Austria. Casting a last glance at the bier, she submissively followed her son out.

Their early breakfast was served in the same room in the annex where Jenny had slept. The open window overlooked the garden. The sight of the gleaming tea-service and the glass jars containing butter and honey brought a smile of ingenuous satisfaction to Mme. de Fontanin's face. For her, the early breakfast with her children had always been a cheerful prelude to the day, a little, hallowed oasis of content in which her native optimism took a new lease of life.

"Yes," she said as she went up to the table, "I can't deny I'm hungry. You too, dear, I expect—aren't you?"

Unthinkingly she began cutting slices of bread and buttering them. Daniel watched her with a tender smile; he was moved at seeing once again in the gay morning light those small hands, white and plump, gracefully intent upon their ritual task; the scene brought back to him the early mornings of his schooldays.

The sight of the well-stocked breakfast tray, by some obscure association of ideas, led Mme. de Fontanin to remark: "I've thought of you so much, dear, during these last manoeuvres—did you have enough to eat? Sometimes at night I pictured you sleeping out under a haystack, your clothes all drenched with rain, and I was so ashamed of being in a comfortable bed, I couldn't sleep."

Bending forward, he laid his hand on his mother's arm. "What ideas you have, Mamma! On the contrary, after being cooped up in barracks, it was a treat for us to play at real war for a bit." He was toying with the gold chain-bracelet on her wrist. "And anyhow, Mamma, an N.C.O. on manoeuvres has no trouble about getting a comfortable bed to sleep in."

He had come out with it rather thoughtlessly; the memory of certain amorous encounters he had chanced on when in billets flashed into his mind, giving him a feeling of embarrassment, registered—albeit obscurely—by his mother's intuitive mind. She looked away.

After a short silence she asked timidly: "When do you start back?"

"Tonight at nine. My leave is really up at midnight, but it'll do if I'm back for six o'clock parade."

It struck her that the funeral would not be over before half-past one and they would not be back at the apartment till two; that this last day with Daniel would be cruelly short. As if the same thought had come to him he said: "And I have to go out this afternoon, on urgent business."

From his tone she guessed that he was concealing something. But she misjudged its nature. For he had employed exactly the same evasive, rather too casual tone that he used to assume in earlier days when, after sitting in front of the fire at home for an hour or so after dinner, he would rise and say: "Sorry, Mamma, but I've promised to meet some fellows tonight."

He had an inkling of her suspicion and made haste to dispel it. "I've a cheque to cash. A cheque of Ludwigson's."

It was true. He did not wish to leave Paris without having given this money to his mother.

She did not seem to have heard. She was drinking her tea as she always did, in little, scalding sips, without putting down her cup and with a far-away look in her eyes. Her heart was heavy with thoughts of Daniel's impending departure. For the moment she had forgotten all about the funeral. Still, she reflected, she had no right to complain; what had afflicted her for so many weary months, her son's absence, was drawing to a close; in October he would be back and their home life would begin anew. And now she conjured up a picture of tranquil years ahead, for, though she would not avow it to herself, Jerome's death had cleared the horizon. Henceforth she would be free, independent, with her two children beside her.

Daniel was gazing at her with a look of anxious solicitude. "What are you going to do in Paris, you and Jenny, during the next two months?"

(Being pressed for money, Mme. de Fontanin had let her house at Maisons-Laffitte for the summer season.)

Here, she thought, is the moment to tell him that I mean to go to Austria. "Don't be anxious, dear. For one thing, I shall be terribly busy settling up your father's affairs."

"It's on Jenny's account I'm so worried," he blurted out.

Though his sister's morbid taciturnity was nothing new to him, he had been struck during the last few days by Jenny's haggard cheeks, the feverish glitter of her eyes.

"She's awfully rundown," he explained. "What she really needs is an outdoor life."

Mme. de Fontanin replaced her cup on the tray without replying. She, too, had noticed something unusual in her daughter's expression, a careworn, haunted look for which her father's death was insufficient reason. But she did not share Daniel's views regarding Jenny. "There's something sadly lacking in her," she sighed, adding with touching candour: "She has never learned to trust." Her voice grew slightly formal, deferential, as was her wont when broaching certain topics. "Every human soul, you know, must have its inner conflicts, its trials

"Yes," Daniel cut her short. "But all the same, if Jenny could have had some mountain air this summer or gone to the sea …"

"Neither would have done her the least good." Mme. de Fontanin shook her head emphatically, with the obstinacy of all gentle souls obsessed by an unshakable belief. "It isn't Jenny's physical health that's the trouble. Believe me, no one can help her in any way. Each human soul must work out its salvation alone—as it will be alone when the Last Enemy confronts it at the appointed hour." She was thinking of Jerome's end, unfriended and alone, and her eyes filled with tears. After a short silence she murmured: "Alone with its Maker."

"It's ideas of that sort …" Daniel began. There was a hint of exasperation in his voice. Then he took a cigarette from his case and fell silent.

"Yes? 'Ideas of that sort'?" Mme. de Fontanin repeated in a surprised tone.

She watched him close the cigarette-case with a snap and tap the cigarette on the back of his hand before putting it to his mouth. Exactly like his father! The same hands, the same gestures! The identity was all the more striking as Daniel now wore the ring which Mme. de Fontanin herself had removed from Jerome's finger before she locked his hands upon eternal rest. The massive cameo ring recalled to her, with a swift stab of pain, those slender yet virile hands that would survive henceforth only in her memory. And at the slightest personal recollection of Jerome she could not keep her heart from thudding wildly, as it had done when she was twenty. But, as ever, such glimpses of the likeness between father and son caused her not only a gentle thrill of pleasure but also immense anxiety.

"Yes? 'Ideas of that sort …'?" she repeated.

"I only meant to say—" He hesitated, screwing up his eyes as he wondered how best to put it. "Well, it's because of ideas of that sort that you've always made a point of never interfering in the lives of others, of letting them follow their own paths, even when those paths were obviously wrong ones and could only bring suffering into their lives and into yours as well."

Cruel as was the shock, she conjured up a smile, making as if she had misunderstood. "Are you blaming me, my dear, for having allowed you too much liberty?"

Daniel, too, smiled and, bending forward, laid his hand on his mother's. "I don't blame you, Mother dear, and I'll never blame you for anything—you know that quite well." He gazed at her tenderly; then his obsession got the better of him. "And you know quite well, too, that I wasn't thinking of myself when I said that."

A wave of indignation swept over her. "Really, Daniel, that's not nice of you!" She was stung to the quick. "You never miss a chance of speaking ill of your father; it's most unkind."

On that particular morning, a few hours before the funeral, such talk was singularly ill-timed, and Daniel was conscious of it. He already regretted having made the remark. But his vexation with himself for having come out with it urged him perversely on to make things worse.

"And you, Mamma, have only one idea in your head—and that's to whitewash him! You shut your eyes to everything, even the appalling difficulties in which he's left us."

Though she had only too good reasons for sharing Daniel's opinion, for the moment her one desire was to shield the father's memory against the son's attack. "Oh, Daniel, how unjust you are!" The cry ended in a sob. "But, then, you never understood your father, the man he really was." With the blind zealotry of those who plead indefensible causes, she went on. "There's nothing really serious to reproach your father with—nothing whatever. He was too chivalrous, far too generous and trusting, to succeed in business. That's all there is against him. He let himself be led astray by scoundrels whom he should have kept at arm's length. Yes, there's nothing worse than that—and I shall prove it. He may have acted unwisely, with 'deplorable irresponsibility,' as Mr. Stelling called it in my hearing. But that's the utmost that can be laid at his door. He lacked a sense of responsibility."

Daniel's lips stirred and he made a slight, impatient movement of his shoulders, but he did not look at his mother or answer her. He recognized that, despite their mutual love, and however much he might desire it, any hope of speaking frankly on this subject must be ruled out. At the first contact, their hidden thoughts were at cross-purposes; grievances rankled even in their silences. He stared dully at the floor, without speaking.

Mme. de Fontanin, too, kept silent. Why go on with a conversation that had taken a wrong turn from the start? She had intended to inform her son of the criminal proceedings that had been instituted in Vienna, so as to make Daniel understand how necessary it was for her to go there. But her son's harshness had cut her so deeply as to drive out of her head all thoughts save one: how to exculpate Jerome. And this obviously took the cogency out of the arguments she might have used to justify the trip to Austria. "It can't be helped," she thought. "I'll explain it in a letter."

For several minutes there was a constrained silence. Daniel was gazing out of the window, his eyes fixed on the treetops and the morning sky. He was puffing at a cigarette with a simulated ease that duped his mother as little as himself.

"It's eight," Mme. de Fontanin murmured. She had just heard a clock strike in the hospital. Gathering up the crumbs that had fallen in her lap, she strewed them on the windowsill for the birds, then said in a tranquil voice: "I'll go down again now."

Daniel rose. He was heartily ashamed of himself and aching with remorse. As always happened when his mother's blind devotion to her husband forced itself upon his notice, his enmity toward his father grew the keener. Some impulse to which he could not give a name had always urged him to persecute that too indulgent love.

Throwing away his cigarette, he went up to his mother with a shy smile, then in silence bent and kissed her, as he often did, on her forehead, just at the margin of her prematurely white hair. His lips knew the place well; and his nostrils, the warm scent of the skin. Tilting her head a little backward, she clasped his cheeks between her palms. She said nothing, but, smiling, let her gaze sink into his, and her smile, her eyes in which was not a glimmer of reproach, seemed to be saying: "Everything's forgotten. Forgive me for being so easily put out, and don't feel the least remorse for having hurt me." He knew that wordless speech so well that with a slow flutter of his eyelids he signified assent. She was getting up from the chair; he helped her to rise.

Still unspeaking, she took his arm and went down the stairs to the basement. He opened the mortuary door for her and she entered alone.

As she went in, the perfume of the roses wilting on the coffin came to her, borne on a waft of cool, cloistered air.

Jenny was sitting beside the coffin, motionless, her hands resting on her knees. Mme. de Fontanin went back to her seat beside her daughter. She took her Bible from her little handbag, which was hanging on the back of the chair, and opened it at random. (As a matter of fact, though she deemed it at random, the well-thumbed, broken-backed old volume invariably opened at one or another of the passages, her favourites, to which she oftenest turned.) She began reading.

> Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.
>
> Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

She raised her eyes, meditated for a while, then laid the book on her lap. Her reverent way of handling, opening, and closing her Bible was in itself a rite of piety and gratitude.

She had wholly regained her peace of mind.

# Chapter X

ON THE previous evening, after watching Jaurés enter a taxi and drive away into the darkness, Jacques had joined a group of Socialists with a propensity for late hours who often saw the night through at the Chope tavern. The private room reserved for members of the Party had a special entrance from the courtyard, and was thus available after the public bar had closed. The talk had been so animated and gone on so late that Jacques had not left the premises till three. Lacking the energy at this belated hour to trudge back to his lodgings at the Place Maubert, he had turned into a small, shabby hotel near the Bourse. No sooner did his cheek touch the pillow than he fell into a heavy sleep which even the early morning hubbub of this crowded quarter of the city failed to disturb.

It was broad daylight when he awoke. After a hasty wash he went downstairs, bought the morning papers, and hurried to the terrace of a Café on the boulevards to study them.

At long last the press thought fit to sound a warning note. The Caillaux case was relegated to the second page and bold headlines in every paper proclaimed the gravity of the situation, describing the Austrian note as an ultimatum and the line being taken by Austria as one of barefaced provocation. Even the *Figaro*, which for the past week had been devoting all its columns to a full-length, *verbatim* report of the Caillaux trial, now flaunted on its front page an inch-high headline: THE AUSTRIAN MENACE, and a whole page dealt with the European crisis under the caption "Is It War?" The semi-official *Matin* took a definitely warlike tone. "The Austro-Servian controversy was one of the subjects discussed during the President's stay in Russia. The Dual Alliance will not be caught unawares." Clemenceau, in his paper *L'Homme Libre*, wrote: "Never since 1870 has Europe been so near the brink of war, a war the scope of which it is impossible to foresee." Describing von Schoen's visit to the Quai d'Orsay, the *Echo de Paris* spoke of "a threat from Germany following on the heels of Austria's peremptory demands," and a late edition warned its readers that war might be declared overnight if Servia did not yield.

Naturally, only a war between Austria and Servia was contemplated for the moment. But what assurance was there that the conflagration could be kept from spreading? Jaurés in his leading article made no secret of the fact that the last hope of peace lay in the humiliation of Servia, an inglorious surrender to Austria's demands. Extracts from the foreign press showed that opinion in other countries was equally pessimistic.

On that morning of July 25, barely twelve hours before the expiration of the time-limit granted Servia, all Europe—as foretold by the Austrian general whose ominous remark Jacques had culled in Vienna a fortnight earlier—had a rude awakening.

Pushing aside the newspapers littering the table, he drank his coffee; it had gone cold. True, he had learned nothing he did not know already, but somehow, stated thus in print, this world-wide consternation took on a new, appalling actuality. In a mood of profound dejection he watched the daily crowd of workmen and employees alighting from their buses and hurrying away to their work. There was an unwonted earnestness on their faces and each was carrying an open newspaper. For a moment his courage failed him; the burden of his loneliness seemed past enduring. Then suddenly a thought crossed his mind—of Jenny, Daniel, the funeral taking place that morning.

Hastily rising, he set off in the direction of Montmartre. It had struck him that he might look in at *Le Libertaire*. He was eager to be back again in an atmosphere of combat.

In the Rue d'Orsel, even at this early hour, a small group had collected in quest of news. Newspapers of the "advanced" persuasion were being passed from hand to hand. The front page of the *Bonnet Rouge* was devoted to the Russian strikes. For most revolutionaries the serious nature of the labour unrest in St. Petersburg was one of the best guarantees of Russian neutrality—in other words, the restriction of hostilities to the Balkans. All those connected with *Le Libertaire* were at one in condemning the remissness of the Socialist International and accusing the leaders of "playing up" to their respective governments. Now, if ever, was surely the moment to deal a vigorous blow, to foment strikes in other countries by every possible means so as to paralyse all the high commands of Europe simultaneously. Now was the ideal opportunity for a mass uprising that might well not only dispel the threat of war but bring the revolution many years nearer.

Jacques listened to their talk, but was chary of expressing his own opinion. In his view the Russian strikes were a double-edged weapon. They might indeed checkmate the warlike activities of the High Command, but they might also furnish a government in a tight corner with a pretext for taking drastic measures. Under colour of the danger of war, martial law might be proclaimed and the revolutionary movement violently cut short by stern, repressive action.

The clock pointed to eleven precisely when he was back again at the Place Pigalle. "Now what was it I had to do this morning at eleven?" he suddenly asked himself. Nothing came. "Eleven, Saturday?" Anxiously he racked his brains to remember. "Was it the Fontanin funeral?" But surely he'd never had the least intention of attending it.

He walked on, his eyes directed at the ground, puzzled as to what to do. "I'm hardly presentable," he mused. "Not even shaved! Still, in the crowd I wouldn't be noticed. Of course the cemetery's quite near; I could drop in at a barber's—a matter of five minutes. I could just shake hands with Daniel; it's only the decent thing to do. The decent thing, and it wouldn't commit me in any way…."

Already his eyes were hunting for a barber's shopsign.

When he reached the cemetery, the caretaker told him the funeral service had already begun and showed him the direction to take. Soon he had a glimpse, across the gravestones, of a group in front of a small family vault inscribed: DE FONTANIN. He recognized Pastor Gregory and Daniel; they had their backs to him.

The Pastor's raucous voice rose through the silence: " 'The Lord said unto Moses: I will be with thee. And fear not, poor sinner, when you are walking in the Valley of the Shadow, God will be with you, too.' "

Jacques made a circuit of the group so as to have a front view of the mourners. Uncovered, with the full light falling on his brows, Daniel's head dominated all the others. Three heavily veiled women were beside him. The one in front was obviously *Mme.* de Fontanin; which of the other two was Jenny there was no telling.

His arm uplifted in a comminatory gesture, his eyes fanatically aflame, the Pastor was apostrophizing the deal coffin laid on the threshold of the vault under the garish light.

"Poor, miserable sinner, whose sun went down before the shut of day! But, nay, we shall not weep over you as we weep for men without hope. You have left the region of things seen, yet what is lost to our material eyes is but the fleeting form of your vile body. This day you have put on the shining armour of Christ, called to your Master's side in His most glorious service. You have entered before us into the joy of our Lord. And I bid you, my brethren, praying at my side today, possess your souls in patience. For that happy release is drawing near to all of us. Father, into Thy hands I commend our spirits. Amen."

The attendants lifted the coffin, slung it above the tomb, and, paying out the ropes, gently lowered it into the darkness. Leaning on Daniel's arm, *Mme.* de Fontanin gazed down into the yawning hole … (That must be Jenny behind her, Jacques thought, next to Nicole Héquet.) Presently, guided by one of the undertaker's staff, the three women slowly made their way to a funeral coach waiting in the cemetery avenue; it moved away at once, at walking pace.

Daniel was standing by himself at the end of the pathway leading to the grave, his gleaming helmet tucked under his arm. He was looking his imposing best; slim, tall, graceful, and, if as usual a shade punctilious in his gestures, perfectly at ease, he was receiving the condolences of the family friends who were filing past him slowly, one by one.

Jacques watched him, and that mere distant glimpse was enough to fan the ashes of his early ardour into a gentle glow of warm affection.

Daniel noticed him and, as he shook his hand, gazed at him with fond surprise. "Thank you for coming, Jacques." Then, hesitantly, he added: "I'm leaving tonight. I'd very much like to see you again before I go."

The sight of Daniel had brought to Jacques's mind the imminence of war, of fighting on the frontier, the war's first victims… . "Have you seen the papers today?" he asked.

Daniel stared at him uncomprehendingly. "The papers? No. Why?" Then, doing his best not to sound too insistent, he said: "Won't you come to see me off at the Gare de l'Est tonight and say good-bye?"

"What time?"

Daniel's face lit up. "The train leaves at nine-thirty. Shall we meet at the bar at nine?"

"I'll be there."

They gazed at each other for a moment before shaking hands. Then, "Thanks," Daniel said in a low voice.

Jacques walked away without once looking back.

# Chapter XI

SEVERAL times in the course of the morning Jacques had wondered what reactions the turn for the worse in the political crisis might be producing on Antoine. He had vaguely hoped to meet his brother at the funeral.

After a hasty lunch he made his way to the Rue de l'Université.

"The doctor hasn't finished luncheon, sir," said Léon as he led Jacques to the dining-room. "But I've just served the dessert."

To his annoyance Jacques found that Isaac Studler, Jousselin, and young Roy were there as well; he did not know that they lunched every day with Antoine. It was a custom Antoine had established, as being the best way of keeping in daily touch with his assistants, since his mornings were taken up with hospital work and the afternoons with his private practice. And for the other three men, bachelors all, this arrangement meant not only a saving of time but also of an appreciable daily outlay.

"You'll have lunch with us, won't you?" Antoine said.

"Thanks; I've had my lunch."

Jacques walked round the big table, shaking the hands extended to him. As he sat down he threw out a seemingly casual question: "Seen today's papers?"

Antoine gazed at his brother for a moment before answering, and his look seemed to say: "Perhaps you were right after all." "Yes," he said aloud in a thoughtful tone. "We've all of us read the papers."

"Since we started lunch we've been talking of nothing else," Studler confessed, stroking his black beard.

Antoine was careful not to betray unduly his anxiety. All morning a rankling irritation had been preying on his mind. For he set store on feeling himself surrounded by a stable, smooth-running social system, much as he needed a smooth-running home where each material problem was solved for him, in an efficient manner and without his intervention, by a reliable domestic staff. He was quite prepared to put up with minor defects in the system, to overlook occasional scandals in high places—much as he shut his eyes to Léon's wasteful habits and Clotilde's petty pilferings. But he considered that in no event should the destinies of France give him more anxiety than did the proper functioning of his pantry or his kitchen. And it went against the grain that political embroilments should threaten to disturb his working programme, force their tempestuous way into his life.

"I don't consider," he said, "that there's occasion for any great alarm. It's not the first war-scare we've had. Still, I don't deny that this morning's papers strike a rather disagreeable note. There's too much—how shall I put it?—sabre-rattling for my taste."

At the last words Manuel Roy looked up at Antoine; in the boyish face the dark eyes glowed. "A sabre-rattling, Chief, that'll be heard across our frontiers. And which, unless I'm much mistaken, will give pause to some of our too greedy neighbors."

Jousselin, who had been bending over his plate, quickly looked up at the young man. Then he returned to the task of methodically peeling with the tip of his fruit-knife a peach impaled on his fork.

"Nothing's less certain," Studler remarked.

"Still, it may very well have that effect," Antoine suggested. "And perhaps it was necessary."

"I wonder!" Studler sounded dubious. "It's a damned risky game to play, intimidation! It infuriates the enemy quite as often as it checks him. Yes, I'm much more inclined to think the government is committing a vast blunder by making the welkin ring with 'sabre-rattling' as you call it."

"Well, we can hardly put ourselves in the place of the men who're in command," Antoine sagely remarked.

"What I ask above all of the men who're in command," Studler retorted, "is for them to act prudently. To take an aggressive line at all is an imprudent thing to do. And to make people think that circumstances compel them to take that line is equally imprudent. Nothing could be deadlier to the cause of peace than to get the idea rooted in the public mind that we're threatened by a war—or even that there's the possibility of a war."

Jacques kept silent.

"Personally," Antoine said, without looking at his brother, "I can quite understand how a leading statesman—even if as a private citizen he disapproves of war—may be led to take certain aggressive steps. If only for the simple reason that he holds a post of responsibility. A man who has been given the reins of power, whose duty it is to watch over the safety of his country, may well, if he has any sense of realities and if the attitude of a neighbouring state strikes him as a real menace-"

"Not to mention the fact," Roy broke in, "that one simply can't conceive of a statesman worth his salt who'd let his sentimental prejudices run away with him—to the point of avoiding a war at all costs. When a man's at the head of a country that has a place on the map, a great nation with an empire overseas, he's got to think realistically. The most pacifist of our Prime Ministers, once he's in the saddle, is bound to discover pretty quickly that a country can't keep its wealth and guard its territories from the greed of neighbours unless it has a strong army, an army that compels respect and now and again 'rattles the sabre'—if only to remind the rest of the world that it exists."

" 'To keep its wealth,' " Jacques mused. "The cat's out of the bag! To safeguard one's own possessions and, on occasion, grab a neighbour's. That's the whole creed of the capitalists—nations and individuals alike. The individual fights to snatch a profit, the nation to annex new markets, territory, seaports. As if ruthless competition were the only rule of human conduct!"

"Unhappily," Studler said, "whatever turn things take tomorrow, those sabre-rattling antics of yours may well have the most deplorable effects on French policy, foreign and domestic as well." As he spoke, he turned toward Jacques, as though inviting his opinion. In the mild eyes there was a languid, disconcerting lustre that made it almost painful to face them squarely.

Jousselin looked up again, gazed at Studler, then swept the others with his glance. He was fair-skinned, and the finely cut features had an engaging gentleness. His mouth was wide, delicately moulded, always hovering on a smile; the nose was aquiline, rather long and melancholy, and there was a curious glint in the elongated, mist-grey eyes.

"That's all very well," he murmured vaguely. "But you all seem too inclined to overlook the fact that nobody wants a war. Nobody!"

"Are you so sure of that?" asked Studler.

"I dare say," Antoine conceded, "there are a few old fire-eaters who'd welcome one."

"Pernicious old fire-eaters," Studler exclaimed, "who dodder away in fine, heroic phrases and know very well that if war came they could still dodder away to their hearts' content, well behind the firing-line, without risking their precious skins!"

"The danger is," Jacques put in with a cautiousness that was not lost on Antoine, "that almost everywhere in Europe it's those same old men who hold the reins of power."

Roy turned to Studler with a laugh. "Why, here's an opening for you, Caliph, who're so keen on new ideas! You might launch that scheme of yours, as a preventive measure: in the event of mobilization, all the oldest contingents to be called up first, and all the veterans to be dumped in the front line."

"It wouldn't be such a bad idea," Studler grunted.

There was a short silence while Léon served the coffee.

"There's one way and only one," Studler continued in a gloomy voice, "of almost certainly preventing wars. It's a drastic measure, but perfectly feasible in Europe."

"Meaning?"

"To insist on a general referendum, to leave it to the nation to decide."

Jacques alone gave an approving nod.

Encouraged, Studler amplified his view. "Isn't it illogical, isn't it preposterous, that in these days of democracy and universal franchise the power of declaring war should be left to a few men, a government? Jousselin says: 'Nobody wants a war.' Surely no government in any country should have the right to embark on a war—even a defensive war—against the will of the majority of its electors. When it's a question of life and death for a nation, the least one can say is that the nation itself should be consulted. That ought to be a sine qua non."

Whenever Studler became excited the wings of his hook-nose began to flutter, dark blotches mottled his cheeks, and his big equine eyes grew slightly bloodshot.

"There's nothing Utopian in all that," he added. "All that's needed is for every nation to force its government to add a short amendment to its constitution. 'Orders for a general mobilization shall not be passed, and no war shall be declared, unless and until a plebiscite has been held and a clear majority of 75 per cent has voted in favour of such measures.' Think it over! That's the only legal and practically certain way of putting an end to war. In times of peace—we've seen it in France—a man with jingoistic views may on occasion find a majority to vote for his election; there are always hotheads who delight in playing with fire. But if, when there's talk of mobilization, that man was compelled to sound out the opinions of those who put him into power, he wouldn't find anyone willing to confer on him the right of declaring war."

Roy gave a little soundless laugh.

Antoine, who had risen, tapped his shoulder. "Give me a light, Manuel, old man. Now let's hear your views about all that. What would your paper have to say to it?"

The young man looked up at Antoine; his eyes had the docility of an attentive pupil, but he was laughing still with a faint air of bravado.

Antoine turned to Jacques. "Manuel, I may tell you, is a fervent reader of the *Action Française*."

"I read it too, every day," Jacques said, gazing at the young doctor, who returned his scrutiny. "They're an exceptionally intelligent lot, the men who write for it, with really logical minds. One seldom detects a flaw in their arguments. The trouble is—to my mind, anyhow—they almost always start with the wrong premisses."

"Really, now?" Roy drawled. He still had his jaunty, rather supercilious smile, as if it were an effort to bring himself to speak with the unenlightened of subjects which he had at heart. He reminded Jacques of a child wanting to keep a secret. In his eyes, however, there sparkled now and then a light of truculence. Then, as if Jacques's criticism had stung him out of his reserve, he took a step toward Antoine and blurted out: "Personally, Chief, I must say this everlasting Franco-German tension's getting on my nerves. It's been poisoning our lives for the last forty years, ours and our fathers'. And we've had enough of it! If a war's the only way of ending it, let's have a war and get it over. Things are bound to come to that sooner or later. What's the good of waiting, postponing the inevitable?"

"Let's go on postponing it," Antoine smiled. "A war indefinitely postponed's uncommonly like peace!"

"Well, personally, I'd rather have done with it once for all. For this much, anyhow, is certain: after a war, whether we win (as seems more probable) or whether we lose, the matter will be definitely settled in one way or another, and we'll hear no more about the 'Franco-German problem.' Not to mention"—his face grew earnest—"that in the pass we've come to, a good bloodletting might do wonders for us. Forty fat years of stagnant peace are bound to tell on the morale of a nation. And if the spiritual integrity of France is to be recovered only at the cost of a war, well, thank heavens there're some of us will pay the cost without haggling over their precious lives."

There was not a trace of braggadocio in Roy's tone, nor was there any doubting his sincerity. All present were conscious of this—and that they had before them a man of firm convictions, ready to give up his life for the cause that he believed in.

Antoine had heard him out, standing, his cigarette between his lips, his eyebrows puckered. He said nothing, but his eyes lingered on the young man in a look of grave affection tinged with sadness. Courage always appealed to him. For some moments he gazed at the smouldering tip of his cigarette.

Jousselin had gone up to Studler; with his forefinger, the nail of which was yellow, eaten away by acids, he tapped the Caliph on the chest.

"There you are! We always come back to Minkovsky's classification—into 'syntonous' and 'schizoid' types: men who take life as it is and men who turn their backs on it."

Roy burst out laughing. "I'm a 'syntonous' type, I suppose?"

"Yes, and the Caliph's 'schizoid'; and neither of you will ever change."

Antoine glanced at his watch and turned to Jacques. "Come to my den for a minute or two, 'Schizoid,' " he said with a smile, "if you're not in too much of a hurry."

Opening the door of his little study, he stood aside to let his brother pass. “I’m very fond of young Roy,” he said. “He’s such a decent, healthy-minded youngster. And straight as a die. A bit narrow in his ideas, of course,” he added hastily, as Jacques made no response. “Sit down. Have a cigarette. I expect he got on your nerves a bit. One’s got to know him, to understand him. He has the typical mentality of the man who’s keen on games; he never beats about the bush, he faces the facts cheerfully, courageously. He has no use for subtleties of thought—not that he lacks the critical faculty, in his work at any rate. But instinctively he brushes all doubts aside, for uncertainty holds a man up. Perhaps he’s right. His view is that life shouldn’t be spent in juggling with ideas. He never asks: ‘What’s a man to think?’ but: ‘What’s a man to *do*? How can he make himself most useful?’ I’m not blind to his failings, but they’re mostly the faults of youth. They’ll pass. Did you notice his voice? Sometimes it breaks, goes shrill like a schoolboy’s, then he forces it down and talks in deep tones like an adult.”

Jacques, who had settled into a chair, was unconvinced by his brother’s eulogy of Roy. “I prefer the other two,” he confessed. “Jousselin especially seems quite a nice fellow.”

“Jousselin,” Antoine laughed, “is a fellow who always has one foot in wonderland. The typical inventor’s mentality, I imagine. He has spent his life dreaming of things that lie just on the inside edge of the impossible, in that semi-real world where minds like his sometimes make real discoveries. And he has made some, confound him! Really important ones, what’s more. I’ll tell you about them when we’ve more time. Roy’s very funny when he talks about him. ‘Jousselin,’ he once said to me, ‘is a fellow who insists on seeing none but three-legged calves. Some day he’ll deign to observe an ordinary calf and then he’ll fancy he has made a wonderful discovery, and go round telling everyone: “Would you believe it, there are calves with four legs, too!” ’ ”

He stretched himself full length on the sofa, locking his hands behind his head. “As you see, I’ve got together a pretty good team. All three men are very different, and each supplies what the others lack. You’d met the Caliph before, hadn’t you? He’s immensely useful to me; the amount of work he can put in is simply amazing. And the fellow has brains, marvellous brains. I might almost say his brainpower is the most striking thing about him. It’s at once his strength and his limitation. He understands everything without an effort. And each new thing he learns is neatly docketed for reference in his brain—it’s as if he had the pigeonholes all ready in advance. With the result that there’s never the least untidiness in that big head of his. Yet somehow I’ve always felt there’s something queer, outlandish, about him—one can’t quite say what it is—due to his race, I suppose. I don’t know how to put it, but his ideas never seem to come out of himself, to be really part and parcel of his personality. It’s very odd. He doesn’t use his brain as a natural organ belonging to himself, but like a tool—a tool that comes from outside, that somebody has lent him.”

While speaking, he had glanced at the clock; now lazily he swung his legs off the sofa.

Still, Jacques mused, he must have read the papers! Doesn’t he realize the threat that’s hanging over all of us? Or does he rattle on like that just to avoid discussing it?

“Which way are you going?” Antoine asked, as he got up. “Can I drop you somewhere with the car? I’m going to the Quai d’Orsay, to the Foreign Office.”

“Really?” Jacques was taken aback and made no effort to conceal his surprise.

“I’ve got to see Rumelles,” Antoine explained at once. “Oh, not to talk politics; I’m giving him an injection every two days. Usually he comes here, but he called up to let me know he was so overwhelmed with work that he couldn’t leave his office.”

“What does he think of the present state of affairs?” Jacques ventured to ask.

“Haven’t a notion. I thought of asking him about it. Come back this evening and I’ll tell you. No, you’d better come with me; it’ll only take ten minutes, and you can wait for me in the car.”

Tempted, Jacques pondered for a moment, then nodded.

Before leaving, Antoine went to his desk and locked the drawers. “Do you know what I did just before, when I came home?” he asked in a low voice. “I hunted up my military service-book to see my duties in the event of mobilization.” He did not smile. Then in a calm voice he added: “I’m to join up at Compiègne—on the first day.”

Silently the two brothers gazed into each other’s eyes. Then after a moment, Jacques said gravely: “And I’ve no doubt that all over Europe thousands of other fellows did exactly the same thing.”

“Poor old Rumelles!” Antoine remarked as they went down the stairs together. “He was terribly rundown after this last winter and was due to go on leave about now. But Berthelot’s asked him to skip his leave—on account of all this to-do most likely. So he came and asked me to do something to help him to stick it out. I’ve started a treatment, and I hope to fix him up.”

The words were lost on Jacques. His mind was too full of the discovery that, for some cause he could not fathom, all his old affection for his brother had come back today—warm and deep as ever, yet exacting and dissatisfied.

“Oh, Antoine,” he cried impulsively, “if only you knew them better, the masses, the workers of the world, how … how different you’d be!” His tone implied: “How much better as a man you’d be—and how much nearer we should be to one another! If only—if only it were possible for me to love you!”

Antoine, who was walking in front, turned on Jacques indignantly. “Do you imagine I don’t know them, after fifteen years of hospital work? Don’t forget that for three hours each morning, day after day, I’ve been seeing factory workers, people from the industrial suburbs, all sorts and conditions of men. And, as a doctor, it’s the real man I see, the man whom suffering has stripped bare of all pretences. Can you say that sort of experience isn’t as instructive as yours?”

No, Jacques thought obstinately, morosely. No, it isn’t the same thing!

When, twenty minutes later, Antoine left the Ministry and came back to his car, his look was anxious. “They’re in a fearful stew in there,” he muttered. “Cables are pouring in from all the embassies, people rushing about madly between the various departments. Everyone’s very apprehensive about the tone of the reply that Servia’s due to send this evening.” Without heeding his brother’s questioning look, he asked: “Where are you going now?”

“To the *Humanité*,” was on the tip of Jacques’s tongue, but all he said was: “To a place near the Bourse.”

“I can’t drive you there; it would make me late. But, if you like, I’ll drop you at the Place de l’Opera.”

No sooner was Antoine seated than he began speaking again. “Rumelles looked worried. This morning, I gathered, all the Foreign Office staff were staking high hopes on a semi-official communication from the German embassy declaring that the Austrian note was not an ultimatum but only a ‘demand for an immediate reply.’ That, it seems, conveyed in diplomatic jargon several interesting facts:

first, that Germany was making serious efforts to tone down the effects of Austria's high-handed gesture; second, that Austria would not refuse to parley with Servia."

"So we've come to that!" Jacques exclaimed. "They're staking their last hopes on verbal quibbles of that sort!"

"Also, as this morning Servia seemed ready to give in all along the line, almost without protest, there were good grounds for hope."

"And then?" Jacques asked impatiently.

"Then, later on, news came that Servia was mobilizing three hundred thousand men and that, Belgrade being dangerously near the frontier, the Servian government was preparing to move from the capital tonight to a safer place in the interior of the country. Which makes it look as if the Servian reply won't be the hoped-for capitulation and that Servia has reasons for expecting to be suddenly attacked."

"What about France? Does France propose to do anything about It, take some sort of initiative?"

"Rumelles, naturally enough, is guarded, but, from what I could gather, the opinion prevailing among the members of the government is that we've got to show ourselves very firm—if necessary, speed up quite openly our preparations for war."

"I see. The usual policy of bluff!"

"Rumelles says—and one has the feeling that he's repeating what he's been told to say: 'Considering the pass things have come to, the only way for France and Russia to curb the Central Powers is to show that they're prepared to face the worst.' And he said this, too: 'If either of us flinches, it means war.' "

"And, of course, all of them have the idea in the back of their minds that, supposing our threats don't take effect, and if war should break out, our preparations will give us a start over the others, anyhow."

"Certainly. And in my opinion that's a sound argument."

"But don't you see," Jacques cried, "the Central Powers are bound to argue in the same way! And then? Yes, Studler's right; these sabre-rattling tactics are the riskiest of all."

"We've got to leave such matters to the experts," Antoine cut in fretfully. "They must know better than we do what's the wisest line to take."

Jacques merely shrugged his shoulders.

They were nearing the Opera.

"When shall I see you again?" Antoine asked. "Will you be staying on in Paris?"

"I really don't know."

Jacques was stepping out of the car when Antoine touched him on the arm. "By the way …" He paused, to choose his words. "You know—or you don't know—that every other Sunday afternoon a few friends gather at my place. Tomorrow Rumelles is to come at three for his injection and he's promised to join us afterward, for a short time, anyhow. If you'd like to meet him, I'll be delighted if you'll come. Under the present circumstances what he has to say may be … instructive."

"Tomorrow at three?" Jacques said in a noncommittal tone. "Well, yes, perhaps. I'll do my best. Thanks."

# Chapter XII

AT THE *Humanité* office nothing more was known than what Antoine had passed on to Jacques after his talk with Rumelles.

Jaurés had left for twenty-four hours' electioneering in the Rhône Department, where his friend Marius Moutet was running for Parliament. Though the Skipper's absence at such a critical hour had an unsettling effect on the editorial staff, the atmosphere was rather optimistic, and they were awaiting the reply to the ultimatum without undue anxiety. The impression was that Servia, under pressure from the powers, would adopt a tone conciliatory enough to deprive Austria of the least pretext for taking umbrage.

High hopes were founded, above all, on the repeated assurances given by the German Socialist Party; it seemed that, faced by a common danger, French and German Socialists had at last achieved a wholehearted unity. Moreover, most encouraging reports of the spread of the international pacifist movement were steadily pouring in. Demonstrations against the threat of war were growing more and more impressive in every country. Socialist groups throughout Europe were actively conferring with a view to taking concerted, drastic action; the plan of launching a general strike, as a practical deterrent, seemed to be making headway everywhere.

As he was leaving Stefany's office, Jacques met Mourlan, who had come in quest of news. After a few general remarks about the situation, the veteran revolutionary shepherded Jacques into a corner of the room. "Where are you staying, boy? Have you heard that just now the cops are nosing round in all the lodging-houses? Old Gervais has had trouble with them. So's Crabol."

Jacques knew that the keeper of the lodging-house where he was staying, on the Quai de la Tournelle, was on the police list of suspects. Though his identity papers were in order, he had no wish to come in contact with the police.

"Take my tip," Mourlan advised him. "Don't waste any time. Clear out this evening."

That could easily be done. It had just struck half-past seven, and his meeting with Daniel was not till nine. The problem was where to move to.

Mourlan had an inspiration. One of the *Etendard* group, a travelling salesman, was leaving for a week. He rented a room by the year on the top floor of a house near the Halles, facing the porch of Saint Eustache's Church. It was a quiet place and most unlikely to figure on the police registers.

"Let's step round and see," Mourlan suggested. "It's quite near."

The comrade was at home and the matter was settled at once. Less than an hour later Jacques had transferred his scanty belongings to his new abode.

The station-clock pointed to a few minutes after nine when he reached the Gare de l'Est. Daniel was waiting on the platform at the entrance to the bar. As soon as he caught sight of Jacques he went up to him, looking uncomfortable.

"Jenny's here," he said at once.

A flush rose to Jacques's face. His lips parted on an almost soundless "Ah …!" and for a moment all sorts of contradictory plans raced through his head. He looked away, to conceal his discomfiture.

Daniel supposed he was looking round for Jenny. "She's on the platform," he explained. "She insisted on seeing me off." He sounded apologetic. "It would have been unkind to tell her about our appointment; she wouldn't have dared to come. So I only mentioned it just now."

Jacques had regained his composure, "Well, I must be going, anyhow," he said briskly. "I only came to say good-bye." He smiled. "And now that's done, I'm off!"

"No, please don't go!" Daniel cried. "I've heaps of things to say." Suddenly he added: "I've been reading the papers."

Jacques looked up, made no comment.

"Tell me, Jacques," Daniel asked, "if there was a war, what would *you* do?"

"What would I do?" He made a gesture seeming to imply: "That would take too long explaining." Then, after some moments' silence, he said, putting all the fervour of his hope into his voice: "But there won't be a war."

Daniel was watching him attentively.

"I can't acquaint you with all the plans that are on foot," Jacques went on. "But you can take my word for it—I know what I'm talking about. Already, throughout the working class of Europe there's been such a wave of indignation, and the forces of socialism have been mobilized so effectively, that no government can any longer feel sure enough of its hold on them to embark upon a war."

"Is that so?" Daniel sounded frankly incredulous.

Jacques closed his eyes for a moment. Suddenly, as on a diagram, the situation in its entirety took form across the twilight of his mind. He saw two clean-cut, contradictory lines of force: the leftwing parties at daggers drawn with all existing governments, doing their utmost to stir up the masses to revolt; on the right were the reformists, who, believing that diplomacy could find a way out, were doing their best to co-operate with their governments. And all at once he was afraid, a sickening doubt came over him. But then he opened his eyes again and, with a conviction that impressed Daniel despite himself, repeated: "Yes. You've no idea, I suppose, of the driving force behind the Workers' International as it is today. Everything's provided for. All is set for an obstinate resistance—everywhere: in France, in Germany, in Belgium, and in Italy. The least attempt to start a war would be the signal for a world-wide revolution."

"Which might, perhaps, be even more terrible than a war," Daniel suggested.

A shadow fell on Jacques's face, and he did not answer for a while. "I've never been in favour of violence," he admitted. "Still, if it came to a choice between a world war and a rebellion that would prevent it, how could one hesitate? If some thousands have to die on the barricades to spare the world a futile massacre of millions, there are a good many Socialists in Europe who would feel no more qualms than I do."

Then he wondered what Jenny was doing. If her brother lingered here too long, she would come to fetch him.

"Jacques!" Daniel suddenly exclaimed. "I want you to promise me …" His courage failed him when he tried to continue. "I'm terribly afraid for you," he ended lamely.

Jacques thought: "He's in a hundred times greater danger than I am, and not for a moment does he think about himself." He was greatly moved. Forcing a smile onto his lips, he said: "But I tell you, there won't be a war. Still, we may very well come within an ace of it, and I hope the nations will take the lesson to heart this time. We'll talk all that over some day, if you like. Now I'm off. *Au revoir*."

"No. Don't go yet. Why should you?"

Jacques made a vague gesture toward the platform. "You're … keeping her waiting."

"Anyhow, you might see me into my car," Daniel said sadly, "and say a word to Jenny."

A tremor sped down Jacques's spine. Taken unawares, he stared blankly at his friend.

"Come along!" Daniel clutched his arm affectionately. "I've taken a platform-ticket for you."

Jacques thought: "I'm a fool, giving in to him like this! I ought to put my foot down, to go away." Nevertheless, deep down in him, a soft, insidious voice urged him to follow Daniel.

The station-hall seethed with passengers, soldiers, baggage trucks. It was a Saturday night and for many the beginning of their summer vacations. Jacques and Daniel threaded their way between vociferating, laughing groups surging round the ticket-offices. As they approached the platform-entrances, the air grew darker. Smoke-clouds swirled under the huge glass roof, people scurried about in all directions, the tumult was deafening.

"Mind, not a word about the war in Jenny's presence!" Daniel shouted in Jacques's ear.

She had observed them approaching from the far end of the platform and hastily turned away, pretending she had not seen them. But she could feel their coming; her throat grew parched and the muscles of her neck tautened. When her brother tapped her shoulder, somehow she brought herself to turn with a look of feigned surprise. Daniel was startled to see her face so white, but put it down to fatigue and the emotion of their parting, also perhaps the contrast between her face and the black dress.

Without looking at Jacques, she greeted him with a distant nod and, as her brother was present, dared not refrain from holding out her hand as well. "I'll leave you two together," she said in a shaky voice.

"No, no!" Jacques exclaimed at once. "I'll go instead … I mean, I've got to be off. I've an appointment at ten—at the other end of Paris."

Under a compartment beside them a steam-pipe began hissing so shrilly that they could not hear each other speak; a cloud of vapour billowed round them.

"Well, good-bye, old man." Jacques touched his friend's arm.

Daniel's lips moved, but Jacques could not catch the words, if any. A wan, wry smile screwed up one corner of his mouth; in the shadow of the helmet his eyes glowed strangely, desperately, fever-bright. He gripped Jacques's fingers with both hands. Then, of a sudden, bending, he put his arm awkwardly round his friend's shoulders and kissed him—for the first time in their lives.

"*Au revoir*," Jacques said. Hardly knowing what he did, he freed himself, glanced toward Jenny, bowed, gave a forlorn smile to Daniel, and walked hastily away. But when he was leaving the station some secret instinct made him halt at the edge of the sidewalk.

In the grey dusk the thoroughfare lay spread before him, spangled with lamps and surging with its tides of traffic—a no-man's-land between two worlds. Beyond it lay in wait for him his life of militant activity, a life of loneliness. But on the hither side, in the station just behind him, what wonderful possibilities! He did not know, would not define their nature. All he knew was that to leave this place would be like rejecting a heavensent chance, casting away for ever a golden opportunity.

Feebly, unheroically, he shirked making a decision. Some baggage trucks were drawn up along the wall behind him, and he sat down on one—but not to think things out; in his present state of mingled apathy and nervous tension he was incapable of that. His hat pushed back, he sat hunched forward, his arms limply dangling, his eyes bent on the sidewalk, breathing heavily, his mind devoid of thoughts.

Probably, had chance not intervened, he would have sat on unmoving till presently his mind and nerves regained composure. Then, caught up once more by the feverish rhythm of his life, he would have rushed to the *Humanité* office to learn the contents of the Servian reply. Had it so fallen out, a whole cycle of potential experience would have escaped him, doubtless for ever. But chance did intervene. A porter needed the truck on which he was sitting. Jacques rose and with an enigmatic smile glanced first at the man, then at his watch.

Uncertainly, as though yielding to a casual impulse, he walked back into the station, took a platform-ticket, crossed the central hall, and took his stand beside the platform exit-gate.

# Chapter XIII

THE Strasbourg express had not yet left. The three tail-lamps on the guard's van glowed clear and still. Somewhere, hidden among the people on the platform, were Daniel and Jenny.

Nine-twenty-eight. Nine-thirty. A ripple of unrest traversed the crowd. Doors slammed belatedly. Across the livid sheen of the arc-lamps flurries of snow-white steam swirled up to the glass dome; the line of brightly lit compartments strained and shuddered, to an accompaniment of little creaks and thuds. Jacques's eyes were riveted on the guard's van, unmoving yet. At last it rumbled off, unmasking the gleaming rails as the three red lights receded; slowly the train bearing Daniel away dwindled into the night.

"What next?" Jacques asked himself; he really believed he had not yet made up his mind.

He was standing beside the platform-barrier, watching the people who had seen the train off streaming by—dim wraiths which, as they passed under an arc-lamp just above him, seemed to come momentarily to real life, only to merge once more into the shadows.

Yes, that was Jenny. When he saw her in the distance, his first impulse was to hide, to slink away. But something stronger than his shame held him there; more, led him to advance to meet her.

She was heading straight toward him. Her face still bore the imprint of the parting with Daniel. She walked quickly, with unseeing eyes.

Suddenly, from two yards away, she caught sight of him. Jacques saw her face grow tense at the shock, and, as on that previous evening at Antoine's, a brief glint of terror shone in her dilated pupils.

At first she could not believe that he had had the effrontery to wait for her; something must have delayed him at the station. Her one idea was not to meet his eyes, to slip past him without recognition. But she was caught in a stream of people hurrying out; she could not help passing near him. Then she grew conscious that his eyes were fixed on her intently, and it flashed on her that he was there on her account. When she drew level with him, mechanically he raised his hat. She took no notice of the greeting, but, edging round those in front of her, with lowered eyes, hurried toward the exit, stumbling a little in her haste. It was an effort to keep herself from running. Only one thing mattered now—to get away from him as quickly as possible, to hide in the crowd, to plunge into the subway station, to escape.

Jacques swung around, so as to keep her in sight, but did not move away. Again he asked himself: "What next?" This moment, he knew, was critical, decisive. "Not to lose sight of her," he thought, "that's the important thing."

He started off in pursuit. Travellers, porters, baggage trucks—every sort of obstacle lay between them. He had to steer his way round a whole family camped on their impedimenta; he all but fell over a bicycle. When he looked up, Jenny had vanished. He zigzagged across the crowd, stood on tiptoe to peer with distraught eyes into the maelstrom of moving forms. At last, amid a stream of people converging on the exit, he glimpsed a black veil, slim shoulders… . Now he must not lose her again, must keep his gaze clamped like steel to that slender form!

But she had the start of him. While, hemmed in by the crowd, he was vainly trying to advance, he saw her cross the central hall and turn right, toward the entrance to the subway. Chafing with impatience, he forced his way through the crowd roughly, hustling aside all who were in his path, and started down the steps. Where was she? Then he saw her at the foot of the stairs. In a few strides he had caught up with her.

Again he asked himself: "What next?"

He was quite near her now. Should he address her? Another step and he was at her heels. Breathlessly he called her name: "Jenny!"

She thought she had shaken him off, and his cry was like a brutal blow dealt her from behind. She reeled forward.

Again he called her name: "Jenny!"

She gave no sign of having heard, but took to her heels, spurred on by panic terror. Her heart had grown so heavy that it seemed like one of those intolerable burdens the dreamer has to carry in a nightmare, making escape impossible.

At the end of the passage another flight of steps plunged downward; it was almost empty. Without troubling where it led to, she began running down the steps. At the bottom she saw an arrow pointing to the platform, a ticket-inspector punching tickets. Feverishly she began fumbling in her bag. Jacques saw the gesture. It meant she had a ticket. He had none; the ticket-inspector would not let him by. Once she reached the platform, all hope of catching up with her would be lost. Promptly he made a spurt, drew level, passed her, then swung round and boldly barred her way.

She was trapped, and knew it. Her limbs seemed giving way beneath her. But she faced up, looked him full in the eyes.

He stood before her, barring the way, flushed, his features blurred, staring at her with fanatic eyes; it was the face of a criminal or a madman.

"I want to talk to you."

"No!"

"I insist."

She held him with her gaze, mindful not to betray her terror; the pale, dilated pupils expressed only anger and disdain.

"Go away!" she panted hoarsely, without raising her voice.

For some moments they stayed unmoving, face to face, dazed by the Violence of their emotions, staring at each other ragefully.

But they were blocking the narrow passageway; people hurrying to the trains slipped between them, cursed them for mannerless young people, then looked back, their curiosity whetted. Noticing this, Jenny lost her nerve completely; better give in than cause a public scene. He was the stronger; there was no eluding an interview. But, anyhow, it must not take place here, before all these inquisitive eyes.

She turned on her heel and began walking rapidly up the steps. Jacques followed. Suddenly they found they were outside the station.

"If she hails a taxi," Jacques thought, "or jumps into a tram, I'll get in with her."

The street was brightly lit. Boldly Jenny threaded her way across the traffic, Jacques at her heels. A bus missed him by inches; the driver threw a curse at him. But little he cared for danger. His eyes were fixed on the slim form hurrying ahead of him. Never had he felt so sure of himself.

As she stepped onto the sidewalk she looked back. He was following, a few yards behind. Her mind was made up, she would not try to avoid him. Indeed, just now she was almost eager to make an end of it, to let him hear how she despised him. But—where? Certainly not in this crowded street.

She was unfamiliar with that part of Paris. She noticed a boulevard going up to the right. It was thronged with people, but she took it, at random.

"Where's she going?" Jacques wondered. "It's absurd… ."

His mood had changed; the morbid excitement of a few minutes ago had given place to a vague abashment, mingled with a sentiment of pity.

Suddenly she paused. On her left was a short, narrow street, dark and empty, overshadowed by a lofty building. Deliberately she turned into it.

What would he do? She felt him coming closer. Straining her ears, with tingling nerves, she braced herself to swing round at his first word, at last to give free vent to her anger.

"Jenny, please … please forgive me."

The one thing she had not expected! That note of humble, fervent pleading in his voice! She felt ready to faint, halted, steadied herself against the wall.

For a while she stayed thus, unmoving, hardly breathing, her eyes closed.

He had taken off his hat and remained standing a little way from her.

"If you insist, I'll leave you. I'll go away at once without another word. I promise it."

She only grasped the meaning of his words a few seconds after hearing them.

"Do you want me to go away?"

She thought: "No!" and suddenly was amazed at herself.

Without waiting for an answer, he breathed her name again, and then again: "Jenny!"—so gently, shyly, tenderly, that the mere tone of his voice was a declaration of love.

And she heard its message; raising her eyes, she gazed covertly across the shadows at his resolute, anxious face. The sudden happiness that welled up from her heart almost suffocated her.

Again he asked: "Shall I go away?"

But now his tone was quite different; now he was sure she would not dismiss him until she had heard him out.

She gave a slight shrug and instinctively assumed a look of frigid scorn—her one resource for safeguarding her pride a little longer.

"Jenny, let me speak to you. I *must.* Please, please don't refuse me that. Then I'll go. Come to that little public garden in front of the church. Anyhow, you'll be able to sit down there. Will you come, Jenny?"

She felt the insistence of his gaze compelling her, and it thrilled her even more than his voice. How firm was his determination to solve the riddle of her heart!

She could not find strength enough to answer. But with a stiff gesture, as if she still were yielding only to compulsion, she seemed to tear herself away from the wall and began walking again with the measured gait and unseeing eyes of a somnambulist.

He walked at her side in silence, a little behind her. A cool, delicate fragrance, so faint as to be hardly perceptible, came in wafts toward him, mingling with the warm air of the summer night—Jenny's perfume. And emotion, the pangs of self-reproach, brought tears to his eyes.

That night for the first time the veils were lifted and he frankly admitted to himself the truth: that he had been eating his heart out for Jenny's forgiveness, for her love, from the moment she had crossed his path again. He had half a mind to tell her so—but how could she believe him? He had always behaved to her like a brute, a clumsy, mannerless boor! And surely nothing could ever efface this last affront, his outrageous conduct at the railway-station… .

# Chapter XIV

LAID out terracewise in front of Saint Vincent de Paul's Church, the little public garden was at that hour completely deserted, but the gentle lamplight flooding it dispelled any suggestion of unseemly furtiveness. In the Place La Fayette, too, which it overlooked, the traffic had subsided. They entered the garden by the top gate.

Taking the lead, Jacques walked toward the bench where the light was brightest. Jenny let him guide her and, when they reached the bench, sat down at once with a sedate assurance that belied the fact that her legs were giving way beneath her. Though the rumble of the city reached their ears, it seemed to her that a vast silence brooded round them, the sultry silence, lightning-laden, that preludes a storm. Some elemental power was hovering in the air, some dreadful thing quite beyond her control, beyond his, perhaps; something that would suddenly burst upon them… .

"Jenny!"

The sound of a human voice came like a deliverance. And the voice was calm, and almost comforting.

He had dropped his hat on the bench and was standing a little way from her, talking. What was he saying?

"I've never been able to forget you."

A word rose to Jenny's lips: "Liar!" but she said nothing and did not raise her eyes.

Vehemently he repeated: "Never!" Then, after a pause that seemed eternal, added, more softly: "Nor have you forgotten."

She could not withhold a protesting gesture.

"You may have loathed me, that I can well understand," he went on sadly. "In fact I loathe myself for what I did. But forgotten, no! All the time, deep down in our hearts, we've been thinking of each other—on the defensive!"

She could not bring out a word. But, so that at least he should not misconstrue her silence, she shook her head with all the energy she could muster up.

Impulsively he moved toward her.

"I can't expect you ever to forgive me. I daren't hope you will. All I ask of you is to understand; to believe me when I tell you, looking into your eyes, that when I went away four years ago I *had* to do it. In justice to myself I couldn't have acted otherwise."

Unwittingly he had imparted to that last phrase the fervour which the ideas of "escape" and "freedom" always kindled in him.

She did not stir, but gazed with hard eyes at the gravel path.

"When I think of all I've been through in these last four years!" He paused, made an evasive gesture. "Oh, it's not that I want to hide anything from you, from you of all people! No, far from it, my dearest wish would be to tell you everything, everything. …"

"I don't ask anything of you!" she exclaimed. Her voice had come back, and with it the harsh tone that made her seem so inaccessible.

There was a silence.

"Oh, how far away from me I feel you are at this moment!" he sighed. Then, after another pause, he confessed with touching simplicity: "It's so different with me; I feel so near, so very near you."

Again that wistfully appealing note had crept into his voice, and again Jenny took alarm. She was aware that she was alone with Jacques in this little night-bound garden, far from everyone, and made as if to rise and go.

"No," he said with a compelling gesture. "Please hear what I have to say. I'd never have dared to approach you deliberately after behaving as I've done. But during these last few days chance has brought us together again. And now—here you are before me. Oh, if only you could read my heart tonight! It all seems to mean so little to me now—my going away, the four years' absence, and even—yes, I know it sounds abominable—all the sorrow I may have brought on you. Yes, all that hardly counts beside what I feel tonight. For me that's all past and done with, now that you're with me and at last I'm talking to you. You can't imagine the feelings that came over me when I saw you again the other day at my brother's place."

"And over me!" she could not help thinking. But for the moment this reminder of her anguish of the last few days only made her furious with herself for having been so weak.

"Listen!" he said. "I don't want to tell you any lies; I'll talk exactly as I might talk to myself. A week ago, it's certain, I shouldn't have dared to say that all through those four years I'd never ceased thinking about you. Perhaps I didn't know it then. I know it now. Now I realize what it was, the dull pain that never left me, something that all the time, everywhere, was eating my heart away. It was … my longing for you, you whom I had lost. I had deliberately mutilated my life, and the wound would not heal. Now I see it all so clearly, in this light of the new dawn that's risen for me since you've come back into my life."

She hardly caught what he was saying. Her head was swimming, and the racing pulse of her blood set up a ringing in her startled brain. All the world was growing blurred, trees and houses tottering… . For a moment she looked Jacques full in the eyes, braved their impact without flinching, and her look, her silence, the poise of her head, all seemed to say: "When will you stop hurting me like this?"

He went on speaking in the murmurous silence. "You say nothing, and I can't read your thoughts. But that makes no difference. Yes, it's true; whatever you may be thinking about me now hardly matters at all. For I'm certain that, if only you'll listen to me, I shall somehow convince you. Sooner or later you'll understand. I have the patience and I have the power to win you back to me—I'm sure of it. Through all my boyhood my whole world turned on you; I couldn't imagine for myself a future in which you had no place—even were it a reluctant place. Reluctant, as tonight. For you've always been a little … a little hard on me, Jenny. Everything about me displeased you: my character, my education, my clumsy manners. For years you countered all my advances with a sort of cold dislike, which made me still clumsier, still less likeable. Isn't that true?"

She thought: "Yes, it's true."

"But even in those days your distaste for me hardly mattered—as tonight it hardly matters. What a small thing that was beside what *I* felt then, an emotion so strong and so stubborn—so natural, too, and vital—that for a long time I could not, or dared not, give

it its real name!" His voice shook; the words came in little gasps. "Remember that wonderful summer! Our last summer at Maisons. Didn't you realize, that summer, that you and I were puppets in the hands of destiny, and there was no escaping it?"

Each memory reawakened called up others, moving her so poignantly that again she was on the brink of getting up and going, so as to hear no more. Yet she stayed on, listening, not missing a syllable. Her breath, too, was coming in gasps; she had to gather all her energy to still her laboured respiration, not to betray herself.

"Jenny, when once there has been between two people what there has been between you and me, when they've been drawn to each other as we were drawn, glimpsed such boundless hopes, such visions of the future, what difference can the lapse of four years, ten years, make? No, something has come into being that can never be blotted out… . It's unthinkable!" He lowered his voice, as if to impart a secret. "It goes on growing, perhaps without our noticing it, and strikes root deeper and deeper in our hearts."

It was as if he had laid bare a hidden wound, touched on a raw point of which till now she had hardly been aware, so deep it lay beneath the surface of her consciousness. She leaned back a little, pressing her hand on the stone bench and stiffening the muscles of her arm to keep herself erect.

"And you are still the Jenny of that summer; I feel it, I know I'm right. Exactly the same. Lonely, as in the past." He hesitated. "And unhappy, as in the past. I, too, am the same; lonely, as lonely as I was then. Two lonely people who for four years have been drifting, drifting apart, drifting hopelessly into the darkness. And miraculously have met again. And now that they have met—"

He paused; then cried with sudden vehemence: "Do you remember that last day of September when I summoned up all my courage to say to you as I said just now: 'I've got to speak to you'? That September morning beside the Seine, do you remember it? Our bicycles were lying on the grass in front of us. And, as tonight, it was I who talked. As tonight, you made no answer. But you had come, and you listened to me, as you're listening now. And somehow I knew that you were yielding. Our eyes were full of tears. When I stopped speaking we didn't dare to meet each other's gaze; we parted at once. Then, too, your silence seemed heavy with unspoken thoughts, with sadness. But it was a radiant sadness—radiant with hope."

She gave a sudden start, straightened up indignantly. "Yes!" she cried. "And three weeks later …!" Her voice failed on a choking sob. All unwittingly she was using her anger to mask from herself the growing turmoil of her thoughts.

Jacques's doubts and fears had been swept away by that reproachful, self-revealing cry; a tide of glorious rapture was surging through his heart. "Yes, Jenny, I know." His voice was trembling with emotion. "I owe you an explanation for going away like that. I won't try to exculpate myself. A sort of madness came over me and I gave way. You see, I felt quite desperate, what with my home life, my father, my university career. And there was something else as well."

He had Gise in mind… . Dare he this evening, so soon …? He felt as if he were groping his way along the edge of a precipice.

"Yes, there was something else." His voice sank to a whisper. "I'll tell you everything. I want to be frank with you. Utterly frank. It's hard, you know. When one starts talking about oneself, however much one tries, one can never tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. These sudden impulses I have to run away, to smash everything and break loose, are a sort of disease, I imagine. All my life I've longed for peace and calm. I always fancy I'm the prey of others and, if only I could escape from them, if I could manage to start a wholly new life, I'd at least achieve tranquillity. But tonight, Jenny, I know this definitely: if there's one person in the world who can cure me from breaking loose—it's *you*."

She turned on him again, with no less vehemence. "Did I keep you from going four years ago?"

He had an impression of coming up against something hard as steel that was part of her character and would always be so. Even in the past, even on those rare occasions when their so different temperaments seemed momentarily in harmony, always he had encountered that secret, innate hardness.

"That's true. But—" he hesitated. "Please do let me tell you frankly what I think. What had you done, up to that time, to hold me back?"

In a flash she thought: "Yes, I'd certainly have tried to do something, had I known he meant to go."

"Don't imagine for a moment I'm trying to excuse my conduct. No, I'd only like—" The gentleness of his voice, his timid smile seemed to crave her pardon in advance for what he was about to say. "What did I ever get from you? So little! Now and then a look that was less harsh, now and then a mood a shade less distant. And sometimes a remark that showed a little trust in me. That's all. And all the rest of the time—reticence, rebuffs, aloofness. Isn't that true? Did you ever give me any encouragement that might have been enough to counteract my morbid hankering after the unknown?"

She was too honest with herself not to admit that this reproach was justified. Indeed, it would have been a relief for her just then to be able to blame herself as well as Jacques. But at that moment he came and sat down beside her; she straightened up at once.

"I haven't yet told you the whole truth." The tone in which Jacques spoke these last words was so changed, so harrowing, and at the same time so resolute, that she began to tremble.

"I hardly know how to tell you about—about such a thing. But I'm determined to keep back nothing from you tonight, nothing whatever. In those days there was someone else in my life. A charming, sensitive little being—Gise."

A keen blade seemed to pierce her heart. And yet the spontaneity of this confession, which he was not bound to make, appealed to her so strongly that she almost forgot the pain of it. Yes, he was hiding nothing from her; she could trust him through and through! A curious joy possessed her; she had an intuition that deliverance was near, soon she would be able to desist from this inhuman aloofness and all its agonizing effort.

Jacques, the moment Gise's name had crossed his lips, had had to stifle an unforeseen emotion, an afterglow of that uncertain love which, as he thought, had died long since. It lasted but an instant, a faint, last gleam from embers of a fire that perhaps had waited till this night to flicker out.

"How shall I explain my feelings toward Gise? Words are such treacherous things. What I felt was an unconscious, surface appeal, made up largely of childhood memories. No, that's understating it; I don't want to be unfair to what is past. Gise's presence was the one bright spot in my home life. She had such a sweet nature, you know; a warm little heart that gives itself unstintingly. She should have been like a little sister to me. But"—his voice choked at the end of each phrase—"I've got to tell you the truth, Jenny. My feelings toward her had ceased to be in any way … fraternal. Yes, all the purity had gone out of them." He paused, then added in a whisper: "It was you I loved with a fraternal love, with a love that was *pure*. It was you I loved—like a sister."

A poignant spasm of remembrance seized him and suddenly his nerves gave way. A sob that he could neither foresee nor keep back racked his throat. Lowering his head, he hid his face between his hands.

Abruptly Jenny had risen and moved a step away. It had shocked her, seeing Jacques break down like this, but it had thrown her thoughts into confusion too. And for the first time she wondered if the grievances she had felt-against him were not due to a misconception.

He had not seen her rise. When he noticed she was no longer at his side, he concluded she was going away, lost to him. But he made no gesture of recall; crouching forward, he went on sobbing. Did he for a moment—half unwittingly, half deliberately—visualize himself as another might have seen him then, and guess that his tears might stand him in good stead?

She did not go away but stood there helplessly. A desperate struggle was going on within her; under the frozen calm that pride and modesty imposed, she was quivering with tenderness, compassion. At last she brought herself to take the step that separated her from Jacques and looked down on his head, clasped in his hands, bowed low above his knees. Then awkwardly she stretched her arm forward and her fingers lightly brushed his shoulder, which quivered at their touch. Before she could draw back he had clasped her hand and was holding her in front of him. Gently he pressed his forehead to her dress; she felt the contact sear her like a gust of flame. A still small voice within warned her for the last time that she was slipping fast into a perilous abyss, that she did wrong to love, to love this man of all men. She tautened every sinew, but did not draw back. With terror and delight she accepted the inevitable. Too late; nothing could save her now.

He stretched forth his arms as if to embrace her, but all he did was to press the two slim, black-gloved hands between his. And by those hands that now at last she yielded he drew her down upon the bench beside him.

"Only you can give me that sense of inner peace, the peace I've never known before and I am feeling now beside you."

She thought: "I feel it too!"

"Perhaps someone before me has told you that he loved you." His voice was level, but Jenny seemed to catch in it an undertone just strong enough to thrill her to the depths of her being, spreading a vague, delicious havoc in her heart. "But of one thing I'm positive: nobody else will ever bring to you a feeling that's as deep as mine, so long-lasting and so vital—in spite of everything!"

She did not reply. She was worn out by her emotions. Every moment she felt that he was taking a stronger hold of her and, conversely, that she belonged to him the more, as more and more she yielded to her love.

"Perhaps you've loved someone else? I know nothing of your life."

She looked at him and her eyes held such amazement, shone so crystal-clear, that he would have given anything in the world to blot out the memory of his question.

Quite simply, in the matter-of-fact tone he might have used for drawing attention to some obvious natural event, he said: "No one has ever been loved as you are loved by me." He paused, then added: "I feel that my whole life has been merely a prelude to this moment."

She did not speak at once. At last, in a voice so husky she hardly recognized it as hers, she whispered: "Mine too, Jacques."

Leaning back, she gazed up into the darkness. In one brief hour she had changed more than in a whole decade; her soul was being refashioned by the certitude that she was loved.

Each felt the contact of the other's arm and shoulder, the soft warmth emanating from the other's body. Lost in a maze of thought, with fluttering eyelids, wildly pulsing blood, they kept silent, fearful of the solitude around them, of the brooding shadows; apprehensive even of their happiness, as though it were no conquest but a capitulation to some dark necessity.

Time stood still—then suddenly from the church-tower behind them clang upon clang peremptorily jarred the silence.

With an effort Jenny rose. "It's eleven!"

"Surely you needn't leave me yet, Jenny?"

"I'm afraid my mother may be worried," she explained helplessly.

He did not try to keep her; indeed, he felt a new and curious pleasure in renouncing for her sake what he most desired.

Side by side, without speaking, they walked down the steps to the Place La Fayette. As they reached the sidewalk a cruising taxi drew up.

"Do let me see you home, anyhow," Jacques said.

"No, please."

Her voice was sad, coaxing and firm at once. And suddenly, as if to excuse herself, she gave him a little smile. It was the first time for many years that he had seen her smile.

"I'd like to be alone a bit," she said, "before meeting Mother."

He caught himself thinking: "Very well, then," and was amazed that this parting should seem so easy.

The smile had left her face, and a look of positive distress had settled on the delicately moulded features; it was as though this new-won happiness were still too recent to have effaced the marks of years of suffering.

Shyly she asked: "Tomorrow?"

"Where?"

Her answer came promptly. "I'll be at home all day. I'll stay in for you."

He could not help being a little surprised at first; but immediately, with a feeling of pride, he told himself that they had nothing to conceal.

"At your place, then. Tomorrow."

Gently she freed her hand, which he was squeezing almost roughly Then, stooping, she entered the taxi.

Just as it began to move away, a new thought seized him: War! It was as if a chill had crept into the air and the light suddenly gone grey. Gazing at the car already almost out of sight, he struggled vainly against an onrush of overwhelming fear. The spectre holding Europe in suspense that night seemed to have waited till he was alone again, at a loose end, to swoop down on him.

"No, not war!" he muttered, clenching his fists. "Not war, but revolution!"

For the sake of the love to which his life henceforth was pledged, he longed more than ever for a new world, a world of purity and justice.

# Chapter XV

Jacques woke with a start. Where was he? What was this shabby room?. Half dazed, he blinked toward the window, waiting for memory to return. Gradually it all came back. Jenny, the little garden by the church, the Tuileries, this small commercial hotel behind the Gare d'Orsay into which he had turned at daybreak.

Yawning, he looked at his watch. Nine already! Weary as he was, he sprang briskly out of bed, drank a glass of water, scanned in the glass his haggard features, shining eyes—and smiled.

He had spent the night roaming about Paris. Toward midnight, without realizing how he had got there, he had found himself at the *Humanité* office. Half-way up the stairs he had turned back. He had learned the latest news from the evening papers, which he had glanced through under a street-lamp soon after leaving Jenny. He did not feel up to facing his friends' political confabulations. And on no account would he break the truce he had made with himself or let the tragic turn events were taking mar the splendid hope which made life seem so wonderful that night. Aimlessly he had walked on and on, in the warm darkness, his brain in a ferment, in his heart high festival. The thought that in all the great, night-bound city round him no one but Jenny knew the secret of his happiness filled him with joy. For the first time, perhaps, he had a feeling that the burden of loneliness which had weighed on him always, everywhere, had been lifted. He walked rapidly ahead to a gay, lilting rhythm, as if no slower step could match his jubilation. The thought of Jenny never left him. He repeated to himself the words she had spoken, thrilling to their echo, hearing still each faint modulation of her voice. It was not merely that her presence never left him; she had entered into him, taken possession of him, so thoroughly that his own personality was dispossessed and the look of things, the very meaning of the world, seemed transformed, spiritualized.

Much later on, he made his way into that part of the Tuileries Gardens, near the Pavilion de Marsan, which remains open all night. At that hour there was nobody about; he stretched himself full length on one of the benches. From pools and lawns a cool, clean fragrance was rising, laden at whiles with wafts of heavier perfume from petunias and geraniums. He dreaded the thought of sleeping, for that would mean an end of relishing his joy. He had stayed thus till the sky paled at daybreak, with no clear thoughts in mind, gazing up at the zenith, watching the host of stars retreating one by one. His mind was full of grandiose visions and a peace so pure, so vast, that never had he known its like all his life long.

No sooner was he outside the hotel than he began hunting for a newspaper kiosk. On that day, Sunday, July 26, all the papers printed under indignant headlines the Havas dispatch relating to the Servian reply and, with a unanimity the cue for which had certainly come from the government, protested against the blustering attitude taken by von Schoen at the Quai d'Orsay.

The mere sight of the headlines, the smell of all these papers fresh from the press, revived his fighting spirit. He jumped aboard a passing bus so as to reach the *Humanité* offices the quicker.

Early though it was, there was an unwonted bustle in the building. Gallot, Pagès, and Stefany were already at their posts. News of startling developments in the Balkan imbroglio had just come in.

On the previous day, when the time stipulated by the Austrian note expired, Pachitch, the Prime Minister, had handed the Servian reply to Baron von Giesl, the Austrian representative at Belgrade. This reply was more than conciliatory; it was a capitulation. Servia gave way at every point, agreed to repudiate officially all propaganda directed against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and to publish this repudiation in the *Official Gazette*. Servia further undertook to dissolve the nationalistic organization known as Norodna Obrana and even to cashier such army officers as were suspected of anti-Austrian activities. All Servia asked was to be given further information as to the exact wording of the notice to be published in the *Official Gazette* and as to the nature of the court to be appointed for inquiring into the guilt of the suspected officers. These trivial reservations were of a wholly inoffensive nature.

Nevertheless, as though the Austrian embassy had been given orders at all costs to break off diplomatic relations between the countries and force a war on Servia, hardly was Pachitch back in his office when, to his dismay, von Giesl apprised him that "the reply was unsatisfactory" and that the Austrian diplomatic staff was leaving Servian territory that night. The Servian government which, as a precautionary measure, had taken preliminary steps for mobilization in the afternoon, promptly evacuated Belgrade and withdrew to Kragujevac.

There was no blinking the seriousness of the situation. Beyond all doubt, Austria was out for war.

Far from discouraging the group at the *Humanité* office, the imminence of catastrophe seemed actually to have strengthened their belief that the cause of peace would triumph in the end, and their hopes were lent support by the detailed information Gallot had collected as to the doings of the Socialist International. The antiwar campaign among the proletariat was making headway; even the anarchists were joining in the struggle. Their congress was to meet in London in a week's time and a debate on the European situation was the first item on their agenda. A mass meeting was being organized, for a near date, by the Confédération Generale du Travail. Its official organ, *La Bataille Syndicaliste*, had just published in bold type the resolutions voted at the trade-union conferences as to the line to be taken by the workers in the event of war. "The workers' response to any declaration of war must be the immediate outbreak of a revolutionary general strike."

Furthermore, all the leaders of the Socialist International, after an exchange of views, had been summoned to a convention at the People's House in Brussels and were now making arrangements for a general meeting of their committee with the specific object of coordinating methods of resistance in every European country and taking effective steps in close cooperation, to enable the nations threatened by war to checkmate the reckless policy being followed by their governments.

All which circumstances seemed highly encouraging.

In the Teutonic countries the opposition set up by the pacifists was particularly impressive. The latest issues of the radical Austrian and German newspapers, which had just arrived, were being passed round, and Gallot translated them, interspersing hopeful comments. The Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung* published an elaborate manifesto drawn up by the Austrian Socialist Party, unreservedly disapproving of the ultimatum and calling for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, in the name of the united working class. 'Peace hangs on a thread today. We refuse to shoulder the responsibility for this war, against which we energetically protest."

In Germany, too, the leftwing parties were in revolt. Vehement articles in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and *Vorwärts* called on the government to repudiate emphatically the line of policy adopted by Austria. The Social-Democrats were organizing a mass meeting in Berlin for Tuesday, the twenty-eighth. In a strongly worded protest addressed to the community at large, they insisted that, even if a Balkan war broke out, Germany must remain strictly neutral. Gallot attached high importance to a manifesto launched the previous evening by the executive committee of the Party. He read out some passages from it, translating as he went. "The war-lust fostered by Austrian imperialism bids fair to involve Europe in wholesale carnage and disaster. We condemn the manoeuvres of the Servian nationalists, but by the same token the provocative attitude of the Austro-Hungarian government calls for our vigorous protest. In its demands we find a brutal insolence which has no precedent in dealings with an independent nation. No other motive can be assigned to it than the desire to bring about a war. The class-conscious German proletariat, in the name of humanity and civilization, vigorously protests against the criminal machinations of the war-mongers; we call peremptorily on the government to bring its influence to bear on Austria for the preservation of peace." This message was welcomed with enthusiastic cries by the little group round Gallot.

Jacques did not share his friends' unqualified approval. Strong though the terms of the manifesto were, they were not, to his thinking, strong enough. He regretted that no overt reference was made to the complicity between the two Germanic powers. There were grounds for suspecting that the two chancellors, Berchtold and Bethmann-Hollweg, were working hand in glove, and had these suspicions been set forth in black and white, the Social-Democrats might well have enlisted all classes of Germans on their side against the government. Jacques criticized with some asperity the, to his mind, overcautious line that German socialism had adopted. In thus attacking the German Socialists he was indirectly attacking the French Socialists, and especially the parliamentary group, the *Humanité* contingent, whose conduct during the last few days had struck him as pusillanimous, unduly nationalist in outlook, and too inclined to truckle to the government. Gallot met his criticisms by quoting Jaurés, who had no doubts as to the staunchness of the Social-Democrats and the efficacy of their antiwar campaign. Nevertheless, in answer to a question put to him by Jacques, Gallot was forced to admit that, if the news coming in from Berlin was to be trusted, most of the official Socialist leaders had come to accept the fact that military action by Austria against Servia was practically inevitable, and they were prepared to fall in line with the Wilhelmstrasse programme: the *localization* of the war, at all costs, on the Austro-Servian border.

"Given the attitude of Austria just now," he said, "and the way she's committed herself—and mind you, there's no getting away from that!—that plan of localizing the war is a sound and practical one. We've got to make the best of a bad job; all we can do is to prevent the trouble from spreading."

Jacques did not share his opinion. "If we confine ourselves to trying to limit the conflict, it's as good as admitting we accept—to say the least of it—a war between Servia and Austria. And that necessarily implies we more or less tacitly decline to take part in the mediatory action of the powers. That's serious enough, but that's not all. Even if the war is localized, it confronts Russia with a dilemma: either she backs down and allows the Servians to be crushed, or else she takes up arms for them against Austria. The odds are, I should say, that the Russian imperialists will snatch at this long-awaited chance of vindicating their national prestige, in which case they'll make no bones about mobilizing against Austria. You can see what that would lead to; automatically it would bring the alliances into play, and the Russian mobilization would be the signal for a general outbreak. So, knowingly or not, by her efforts to 'localize' the conflict, Germany is spurring Russia into war. To my mind, the one hope of peace is, on the contrary—as England proposes—not to localize the conflict but to treat it as a diplomatic problem involving the whole of Europe and directly concerning all the powers, a problem which it's up to the various Foreign Offices to solve between them."

They had heard him out without interrupting, but no sooner was he silent than there came a volley of protests. Each began declaring in an authoritative tone, as if he were in the secrets of the cabinets concerned: "What Germany wants …"; "Russia's quite decided …"; and the like.

The discussion was growing more and more chaotic when Cadieux appeared. He had returned from his trip to Vaize with Jaurés and Moutet, and come straight on from the station.

Gallot got up at once. "Is the Skipper back?"

"No. He'll be here this afternoon. He stopped off at Lyon, where he had an appointment with a 'silkworm.' " He grinned. "Oh, I'm not giving our friend away. The man he's meeting is a bigwig in the silk industry, but he's a Socialist (there *are* some capitalists like that) and a pacifist as well. Fabulously rich, it seems. And he proposes to turn over some of his money to the International funds—for propaganda. No good looking a gift horse in the teeth, eh, boys?"

"If all the Socialists with the money-bags did as much!" Jumelin muttered.

Jacques gave a start; his eyes stayed fixed on Jumelin.

In the middle of the room Cadieux went on talking; he had embarked on a stirring account of his electioneering trip. "I never saw the Skipper in such form," he declared. He told how half an hour before the meeting, Jaurés had learned of the Servian retreat, Austria's rejection of it, the breaking-off of diplomatic relations, and the mobilization on both sides. "The Skipper was all upset when he mounted the platform. That was the only pessimistic speech he's ever made." On the spur of the moment Jaurés had launched into a dramatic picture of the European scene. In a voice of bitter indignation, he had blamed all the nations, turn by turn, for sharing in the general guilt. Austria was to blame; time and again, by acts of criminal rashness, she had all but set Europe ablaze, and today her evil intent was manifest. What was her object in foisting this quarrel on Servia if not to shore up her tottering monarchy by yet another act of violence? Germany was guilty of having seemed, during the preliminary phases, to back the warlike schemes of Austria instead of urging moderation on her. Russia's guilt lay in her perpetual intrigues to extend her empire southward; for years now she had been dreaming of a Balkan war in which, under colour of safeguarding her prestige, she could intervene without undue risk, push on to Constantinople, and seize the Straits. France, too, was guilty; her colonial policy and, above all, her conquest of Morocco had rendered it impossible for her to protest against similar annexations made by others and to impose her authority in the cause of peace. Guilty, too, were all the statesmen of Europe, all the Foreign Offices, to whose activities were due the divers secret treaties imperilling the very existence of the nations concerned and serving only to enable their governments to embark on imperialist wars. "We have tremendous odds against us," he had thundered, "and against the cause of peace! There's but one hope left of saving the world from war today, and that is for the proletariat to stand up as one man against it… . But when I say these things I feel a sort of despair come over me."

Jacques listened with half an ear; when Cadieux had finished, he got up.

A tall, gaunt man, white-haired, grey-bearded, had just entered. He wore a flowing tie and a wide-brimmed felt hat. It was Jules Guesde.

A silence fell on the group. Guesde's presence, the disillusioned, rather bitter expression of his ascetic face, always produced a momentary feeling of discomfort.

Jacques remained leaning against the wall for a few minutes; then suddenly he seemed to come to a decision, glanced at the clock, nodded hastily to Gallot by way of farewell, and hurried to the door.

Militants were coming up and going down the steps in threes and fours, each group engaged in noisy argument and taking no notice of the others. At the bottom of the staircase, an old workingman in blue overalls was leaning by himself against the doorpost. His hands in his pockets, he was watching with a far-away look the people passing in the street. He was chanting in a hollow voice the anarchist refrain which Ravachol had roared out at the scaffold's foot:

"You'll be merry as a lark
When you've lynched that bloody shark
(Damn his eyes!)
Your landlord!"

Passing, Jacques gazed a moment at the singer. That tanned, deeply scored face, with the bald, domed forehead, with its mixture of nobility and vulgarity, of energy and weariness, was not -unknown to him. Only when he was in the street did he remember: he had seen the man one evening of the previous winter at the Etendard office, and Mourlan had told him that the old fellow had just been released from prison, where he had served a sentence for distributing anti-militarist propaganda at barrack-gates.

It was eleven. The city sweltered in a heat-haze presaging storm. The picture of Jenny, which, faithful as his shadow, had been haunting him ever since he awakened, seemed suddenly to materialize; he saw her slender form, her slightly drooping shoulders, her white neck glimmering through the loosely clinging veil. A smile of happiness rose to his lips. She, assuredly, would approve of the resolve he had just made.

At the Place de la Bourse a cheerful band of youngsters on bicycles swept past him. They had parcels of food strapped to their machines, and were evidently off for a picnic in the country. He followed them with his eyes for a moment, then started off toward the Seine. He was in no hurry. He intended to see Antoine, but he knew his brother was rarely back before noon. The streets were quiet—no one seemed about—and the freshly watered asphalt gave off a pungent odour. He kept his eyes fixed on the sidewalk, unconsciously humming as he walked:

"You'll be merry as a lark
When you've lynched that bloody shark
(Damn his eyes!) …"

"Dr. Thibault isn't back yet, sir," the concierge informed him.

He decided to wait outside and began walking up and down the street. He recognized the car at a distance. Antoine was driving; he was by himself and looked worried. Before stopping, he gazed at his brother and shook his head gloomily several times.

"What do you make of all that?" He pointed to a sheaf of newspapers on the seat beside him.

Jacques made a wry face but did not answer.

"Won't you come up and have a spot of lunch?" Antoine suggested.

"No, thanks. I've only a word or two to say."

"Here, in the street?"

"Yes."

"Come into the car, anyhow."

Jacques sat down beside his brother. "I want to talk to you—about money." He seemed to get the words out with some difficulty.

"About money?" For a moment Antoine looked surprised. Then at once he exclaimed: "Why, of course! How much would you like?"

Jacques stopped him with a fretful gesture. "That's not it. I want to talk to you about that letter you sent me, after Father's death. About my-"

"Your share of the estate."

"Yes."

He felt a naïve relief at not having had to utter the words.

"So you—you've changed your mind, eh?" Antoine remarked tentatively.

"Perhaps."

"Good!" Antoine rejoined. He was now wearing the look that so exasperated Jacques, the look of an astute clairvoyant reading another's thought.

"With all due deference," he said, smiling, "I must say that the letter you wrote me on that occasion-"

Jacques cut him short. "I merely want to know-"

"What's become of your share?"

"Yes."

"It's at your disposal."

"Would it be a complicated business if I wanted to—to collect my share? Would it take long?"

"Nothing could be simpler. You've only to drop in at the office of our lawyer, Beynaud, and ask him to renderan account of his administration. After that, you'll have to see Jonquoy, the stockbroker with whom the securities have been deposited, and give him

your instructions."

"Could it be fixed up by tomorrow?"

"In a pinch it might. Are you in such a hurry?"

"Yes."

Antoine did not venture on further questions. "All you've got to do," he said, "is to let Beynaud know that you're coming. By the way, won't you be looking in at my place this afternoon to meet Rumelles?"

"Perhaps… . Yes, I'll come."

"Then it's quite simple. I'll give you a letter and you can take it to Beynaud yourself tomorrow."

"Right!" Jacques said, opening the door. "I'm off now. Thanks. I'll come back this afternoon and get the letter."

As he took off his gloves, Antoine watched his brother's disappearing form. "What a queer fellow he is! He never even asked how much his share amounted to!"

Picking up the bundle of newspapers, he stepped out of the car; rapt in thought, he walked up to his door.

"There's been a telephone call, sir," Léon informed him, without raising his eyes. It was the ambiguous formula Léon had adopted once for all, so as to avoid mentioning *Mme.* de Battaincourt by name, and Antoine never thought fit to remonstrate with him regarding it. "You were specially requested, sir, to ring up the moment you came back."

Antoine frowned. Anne had a perfect mania for calling him up at all hours on the least pretext. Nevertheless, he walked at once to his little study and went up to the telephone. His straw hat on the back of his head, his hand hovering over the receiver, he passed some undecided moments gazing vaguely at the newspapers he had tossed onto the table. Then abruptly he turned on his heel. "No, I'm damned if I do!" he muttered. Really, today he had other things to think about… .

Now that his talk with Antoine had put his mind at rest, Jacques's one idea was to see Jenny again. But, on account of *Mme.* de Fontanin, he hardly dared to call at their apartment before half-past one or two.

"What did she tell her mother?" he wondered. "And what sort of reception shall I have?"

He turned into a students' eating-house near the Odéon and slowly ate his lunch. Then, to kill time, he took a stroll in the Luxembourg Gardens. Dark clouds rising in the west hit the sun now and again.

He was pondering on a jingoistic article in the *Action Française* which he had just read. "For one thing," he reflected, "England won't join in. She'll stay neutral and watch events, till the time comes for mediation. Russia will need a couple of months to get her army into the field. France will be beaten to her feet long before that. So, even for a nationalist, peace is the only reasonable solution. Articles like that are positively criminal; Stefany may say what he likes, but they put ideas into people's heads, there's no denying that. Luckily the masses have a very strong instinct for self-preservation, and—whatever people may say—a marvellous sense of realities."

The spacious garden was dappled with light and shade, gay with flowers and greenery and romping children. Jacques's eye fell on an empty seat at the corner of some shrubbery and he dropped wearily into it. Tingling with impatience, incapable of steadying his mood, he let his thoughts drift idly from one theme to another: Europe, Meynestrel, Jaurés, Antoine, his father's estate—and Jenny. He heard the Luxembourg clock strike the quarter-hour, then the half-hour, and bade himself wait another ten minutes. Then, at the end of his endurance, he jumped up and strode ahead.

Jenny was not at home.

The one thing he had not reckoned on! Hadn't she said: "I'll be at home all day"?

Completely at a loss, he had the explanation repeated to him several times. *Mme.* Fontanin had left Paris for a few days. Mile. Jenny had gone to see her off and had not said when she would be back.

At last he tore himself away from the entrance; a fit of dizziness came over him in the street. Such was the chaos of his thoughts that he even wondered for a moment if there were not some connexion between *Mme.* de Fontanin's abrupt departure and the news Jenny might well have imparted to her when she reached home the previous night. On second thought he recognized that the supposition was absurd. No, he must give up hoping to understand until he had seen Jenny again. He recalled the concierge's words: "Mme. de Fontanin will be away for a few days." In that case Jenny would be alone in Paris for a while—a prospect which consoled him a little for his disappointment.

Meanwhile, what was he to do with himself? He had kept the afternoon free of engagements; he had no appointment till a quarter-past eight, when Stefany was to put him in touch with two particularly active militants attached to one of the local sections.

Antoine's invitation came back to his mind, and he decided to go to his brother's place to spend the time before returning to see Jenny.

# Chapter XVI

THERE were half a dozen guests already assembled in Antoine's big reception-room. As Jacques, on entering, looked round for his brother, Manuel Roy came forward to greet him, explaining that Antoine was in his consulting-room with Dr. Philip and would be back in a moment.

Jacques shook hands with Studler, Jousselin, and Dr. Thérivier, a genial, bearded little man whom he remembered having met at the bedside of his dying father.

A tall man, still young, with a resolute face bringing to mind Napoleon's in his youth, was holding forth in front of the fireplace. "I don't deny," he was saying, "that all the governments are declaring with equal vigour and with every appearance of sincerity that they're not out for war. They'd do better to prove their good intentions by showing more readiness to meet the other fellow half-way. But they rant on about the national honour and prestige, their indefeasible rights, and lawful aspirations! Each seems to be saying: 'Yes, I want peace—but a peace that *pays* me.' And nobody's shocked by this way of talking. The man in the street's exactly like his rulers; his one idea is to do a good stroke of business. That's what is so serious; it's impossible for *everyone* to make a profit; the only way to peace is the way of mutual concessions."

"Who is that?" Jacques asked Roy.

"Finazzi, the oculist. A Corsican. Like to be introduced to him?"

"No, no!" Jacques hastily replied.

Roy smiled and, shepherding Jacques into a corner of the room, began chatting with him amiably. He was familiar with Switzerland and especially with Geneva, where during several consecutive summers he had taken part in the local regattas. On being asked what he was doing there, Jacques talked vaguely about journalism, literary work. He was determined to maintain an attitude of reserve, not to parade his opinions in this milieu. He hastened to switch the conversation to the war-menace. Remembering some remarks the young doctor had thrown out at their previous meeting, Jacques was curious to hear Roy's views.

"Personally," Roy began, stroking with his fingertips his small, silky, brown moustache, "ever since the autumn of 1905 I've had the possibility of a war in mind. I was only sixteen then. I'd just passed my junior exam and was starting on the senior year. Schoolboy as I was, I realized quite well that my generation would have to count on a day of reckoning with Germany; and many of my schoolfriends felt as I did. We didn't want a war, but from that time we braced ourselves to face it as a natural, inevitable event."

Jacques's eyebrows lifted. "Natural?"

"Why, yes! There's an old score to pay off. And we've got to make up our minds to it sooner or later, if we don't want France wiped off the map."

Just then, to Jacques's annoyance, Studler turned abruptly and walked toward them. Jacques would have preferred to carry on his little investigation without the presence of a third party. Hostile though he was to Roy he did not dislike him in the least.

" 'If we don't want France wiped off the map'!" Studler repeated in a surly tone. He turned to Jacques. "Is there anything more sickening than the way these nationalists have of claiming a monopoly in patriotism and always trying to hide their war-lust under a mask of patriotic sentiments? To hear them, one'd think that a love of war was the hallmark of patriotism."

"Congratulations, Caliph." Roy grinned ironically. "But the men of my generation aren't as easy-going as you are; they're more touchy where honour is concerned. We've had enough of taking Germany's bullying methods lying down."

"Still, so far, you must admit," Jacques put in, "the provocation's come entirely from Austria—and it isn't aimed at us."

"So, pending the time when our turn comes, you're prepared to stand by idly and watch them gobble up Servia?"

Jacques made no reply.

"The defence of small nations, so that's the latest war-cry?" Studler guffawed. "Then, when the English coolly annexed the gold mines of South Africa, why didn't France rush in to help the Boers, a small, weak nation—far more likeable, moreover, than the Servians? And today why don't we rush to the rescue of poor, distressed Ireland? Do you seriously regard any of these noble gestures as worth the risk of launching all the European armies at each other's throats?"

Roy merely smiled; then, addressing himself to Jacques, remarked: "The Caliph's one of those worthies with a sentimental turn of mind who have a lot of silly ideas about war and haven't a notion what it is in reality."

" 'In reality'?" Studler cut in. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean—well, several things. First of all, a law of nature, a deep-seated human instinct that you can't uproot in a man without mutilating him shamefully. A healthy man should exercise his strength; that's a law of his being. Then, again, war provides a man with opportunities for developing a host of virtues, of rare and very fine qualities that have a tonic effect on his morale."

"What qualities?" Jacques did his best to keep to a tone of mere inquiry.

Roy cocked his little bullet-head toward the questioner. "Why, obviously those qualities that I rank highest. Manly enterprise, a taste for risks, a sense of duty, and, best of all, a spirit of self-sacrifice, a readiness to subordinate private inclinations to a great collective and heroic ideal. Don't you realize how heroism can appeal to any young man who's worth his salt?"

"I do," Jacques agreed laconically.

"There's something splendid about physical courage!" Roy's face lit up with a smile of exultation. "War for fellows of our age is a glorious sport—there's no game in the world to touch it!"

"You call that 'sport,' " growled Studler, "when its price is paid in human lives?"

"Well, what of it?" the young man riposted. "Isn't the human race prolific enough to indulge in that form of luxury now and then—when it's needful?"

"Needful?"

"A good bloodletting is necessary sometimes for a nation's health. When there's been a too long spell of peace, the world secretes a host of toxins which it has to get out of its system somehow, like the man who leads a too sedentary life. And just now, I believe, a

good bloodletting will do the French morale a world of good. The European morale, too. In fact, it's indispensable, if we don't want this Western civilization to sink into a morass of decadence, of vileness."

"Vileness, to my mind," Studler said, "is just that—giving way to cruelty and hatred."

"What's cruelty or hatred got to do with it?" the young man retorted with a contemptuous shrug. "We've heard those silly old clichés too often; they're the stockin-trade of pacifists. But, I assure you, for men of my generation war doesn't involve any appeal to hatred, still less to cruelty. War isn't a quarrel between one man and another; it's on a far grander scale, a test-match between nations. A great adventure. The king of sports! The battlefield's a stadium in which two rival teams compete. And the men who're fighting aren't enemies, they're competitors."

Studler gave a short whinnying laugh and fixed his eyes on the young fighting-cock, the dark, dilated, almost expressionless irises swimming in pools of milky whiteness.

"I've a brother who's in the army, in Morocco," Roy went on in a gentler voice. "You haven't a notion, Caliph, what army life is really like. The mentality of the younger officers, their fundamental decency, their self-sacrifice, would be a great surprise to you. They're living examples of all that selfless courage can mean when put to the service of a fine ideal. Some of your Socialists might do worse than go to school with them. They'd have a glimpse of what a disciplined community can be, in which each individual genuinely dedicates himself to the common good and leads an almost monastic life, a life that leaves no room for sordid personal ambition."

He had turned toward Jacques as if asking his approval, and the frankness of his look made Jacques feel it would be unfair to keep silent any longer. "I believe that's quite correct." He weighed his words carefully. "Anyhow, as regards the younger officers of our army overseas. And there's nothing more moving than to see men stoically prepared to give up their lives for an ideal, whatever that ideal may be. But I think, too, that these young officers are victims of a ghastly error. They imagine in good faith that they're serving a noble cause, while in reality they're serving the interests of capitalism. You were speaking of the colonization of Morocco. Well—"

"The conquest of Morocco," Studler cut in, "was nothing more than a racket, a huge conspiracy. And the men who go and get themselves killed over there are its dupes. It never strikes them that they're giving up their lives to serve a gang of brigands."

Roy turned pale. His eyes were aflame with indignation. "In this rotten age we live in," he exclaimed, "the army is the one place where there's still some decency, some nobility left!"

"Ah, here's your brother!" Studler touched Jacques's arm.

Dr. Philip had just come in, followed by Antoine.

Jacques did not know Philip, but he had heard his brother talk of him so often that he observed the newcomer with interest. He saw an elderly man, with a small pointed beard, walking with little springy steps and wearing an alpaca coat so much too large for him that it dangled from his shoulders like a scarecrow's tattered smock. The bright, beady eyes, lurking beneath bushy eyebrows, shot glances right and left without coming to rest on anyone.

There was a lull in the conversation, while those present one by one greeted the eminent physician, who returned their handshake limply.

Antoine introduced his brother. Jacques was conscious of being subjected to a scrutiny so keen as to be almost rude, the mask, perhaps, of an excessive shyness.

"Ah, yes, your brother… . Yes, of course," Philip muttered in his nasal drawl, chewing his under-lip; the tone of voice seemed to imply that he was thoroughly conversant with Jacques's life and character, down to the smallest detail.

All at once, his eyes still fixed on Jacques, he said: "You've been in Germany a good deal, I hear. So have I. That's interesting, now."

He was moving forward with little steps as he spoke, steering Jacques toward a window where they would be out of earshot of the others. "Germany," he continued, "has always been a puzzle to me. A land of extremes … of paradoxes, don't you think? Could you find anywhere else in Europe a type of man more congenitally peace-loving than the German? No. And yet there's militarism in his blood, it seems."

"Still," Jacques ventured to put in, "the internationalist group in Germany is one of the most active in Europe."

"Do you think so? Yes, that's all very interesting. But I must admit that, contrary to all my previous ideas on the subject, if we're to judge by what's been happening these last few days …" He left the phrase unfinished, then went on to say: "It seems that at the Quai d'Orsay everyone had been counting on Germany to take a conciliatory line. And now they're all at sea… . But you were talking about the internationalist movement in Germany, weren't you?"

"Yes. In Germany, once you get away from the military milieu, you find a pretty general mistrust of nationalism and the army. The League for International Conciliation is a very active organization, and most of the big names of the German middle class figure on the membership list. It's far more influential than our pacifist societies in France. Also, we shouldn't forget that Germany's a country where we have actually seen a red-hot militant like Liebknecht, after going to jail for his anti-militarist propaganda, being elected to the Prussian Landtag and, after that, to the Reichstag. Can you imagine a notorious anti-militarist here in France getting into Parliament and, what's more, making his weight felt there?"

Philip gave a few little, meditative sniffs. "Quite so. Quite. That's very interesting indeed." Abruptly he went on: "I always used to think that now that capital and credit and big business had become internationalized, now that the smallest local disturbance has repercussions all over the world, that here was a new, decisive factor making for universal peace." He smiled and stroked his beard. "That was one way of looking at it," he concluded cryptically.

"That's what Jaurés thought, and he thinks so still."

Philip made a wry face. "Jaurés? And Jaurés counts on the influence of the masses to prevent a war. That's one way of looking at it, of course. One can easily picture a mass impulse of an aggressive form, an outbreak of war-fever. But a mass impulse with the kind of forethought, common sense, and firmness needed to maintain peace—that's quite another story!

"Perhaps those who, like myself, have a distaste for war are at bottom prompted by purely personal motives, a congenital, almost physical aversion to it. The truly scientific view might well be to regard the destructive impulse as a natural instinct. Biologists, I fancy, bear that out." Again his thought took a new turn. "The funny thing, you know, is that I can't discern a single one of all the

problems Europe's tangled up in nowadays—problems it would take years of research to solve—which there's the faintest hope of cutting, like a Gordian knot, by a war. That being so—"

He broke off with a smile. His remarks never appeared to chime in with what he had just said or heard. There was a mischievous twinkle in his deep-set eyes; he seemed always to be telling himself some spicy story the savour of which he reserved for his private delectation.

"My father was an officer," he went on. "He served in all the campaigns of the Second Empire. I was brought up on military history. Well, if you take the trouble to unravel the real causes of any recent war, you're always struck by their *non-necessity*. It's very interesting. Looking back at it in perspective, we always see that it could have been avoided—to all appearances, quite easily—if two or three statesmen had shown some common sense and a real wish for peace. And that's not all. In most cases, it seems that each of the nations concerned let itself be stampeded into a state of mistrust and fear, both of them quite groundless and due to a misunderstanding of the true intentions of the adversary. It's panic that nine times out of ten sets nations at each other's throats." He gave a short, crisp laugh that sounded like a cough. "Exactly like a pair of nervous imbeciles who meet each other in a lonely lane at night, get panicky, and end up by going for each other—because each one thinks he's about to be attacked and prefers taking the offensive, with all its risks, to remaining in suspense. It's comical, really. Just look at Europe now—hag-ridden by fear! Austria's afraid of the Slavs and afraid of losing her prestige. Russia's afraid of the Germans and afraid that, if she stays put, it will be taken as a sign of weakness. Germany's afraid of a Cossack invasion, and of being 'encircled.' France is afraid of Germany's armaments, and Germany is arming only because she's afraid, in self-defence. And not one of them will make the least concession for the sake of peace, because they're all afraid of seeming to be afraid."

"There's another thing," Jacques suggested. "The imperialist powers deliberately keep up this atmosphere of fear, because it suits their purposes, as they well know. Poincaré's policy during the last few months might be defined as a scientific exploitation of national alarm."

Philip had not been listening. "The most damnable thing"—he caught himself up with an abrupt guffaw—"the most comical thing, I mean, is that all the politicians try to hide this fear behind a parade of noble sentiments and bravado."

He noticed Antoine coming toward them, and stopped speaking. With Antoine was a man in the early forties whom Léon had just shown in. It was Rumelles. He cut an imposing figure, forecast by nature to adorn official functions. His big head was flung well back, as if overweighted by the thick, shaggy mass of his silvery-blond hair. A short, bushy moustache, the tips of which were jauntily up-twirled, gave a touch of character to the flat, fleshy features. His eyes were rather small and sunken, but the china-blue irises, restless and alert, lightened the portentous gloom of his expression with little dancing flames. In a general way, Rumelles's face was not lacking in character; it was easy to foresee that some day it would prove a godsend to some purveyor of official busts for town halls in the provinces.

Antoine introduced Rumelles to Philip, and Jacques to Rumelles. The politician bowed to the old doctor as he would have bowed to some celebrity of the day. To Jacques he proffered a courteously friendly hand. He seemed to have taken as his watchword: For a front-rank man, a simple genial manner is the thing.

"There's no need to tell you, my dear Rumelles, what's the burning topic here today," Antoine said bluntly, placing his hand on Rumelles's arm.

"Obviously, M. Rumelles, as regards the true state of affairs, you have the advantage of us," Philip remarked, his gaze bent quizzingly on Rumelles. "Outsiders like ourselves have to depend on what we read in the newspapers."

The politician made a noncommittal gesture. "You're mistaken, Professor, if you think I know much more about it all than you do." He looked round to see if the sally had drawn appropriate smiles. "Still, subject to that reservation, I don't think we should take too gloomy a view of the situation. I'm more inclined to say—indeed, I'm bound to say—there are far more reasons for optimism than for despair."

"Good for you!" Antoine exclaimed. He had been steering Philip and Rumelles toward the two chairs placed near the middle of the room, round which the other guests were grouped.

"Reasons for optimism?" the Caliph echoed in a dubious tone.

Rumelles's blue eyes flashed round the group gathered about him, before settling on Studler. "The situation's grave, I'll allow, but it's no use exaggerating its gravity." He tossed back his head and, in the commanding tones of a statesman whose task it is to hearten a despondent audience, added: "Bear well in mind that the factors making for peace are still in the majority."

"What factors, for instance?" Studler asked.

Rumelles frowned slightly. The Jew's insistence vexed him; he felt a current of ill-will underneath it.

"What factors, for instance?" he repeated, as if there were so many that he had difficulty in choosing. "Well, for one thing, there's England. The Central Powers have encountered from the start a vigorous opposition from the Foreign Office."

"England!" Studler broke in. "Riots in Belfast! Street-fighting in Dublin! The Buckingham Palace conference a dismal failure! There's a regular civil war in the making. Ireland's like an arrow planted in England's back, paralysing her energies."

"No more than a thorn in her heel, I assure you."

Léon appeared at the door. "You're wanted on the phone, sir," he said to Antoine.

"Say I'm busy," Antoine retorted peevishly.

"Oh, you needn't have any fears for England," Rumelles said. "If you knew, as I do, the sort of man they have in Sir Edward Grey; cool, levelheaded—a very fine type of statesman …" He avoided meeting Studler's eye and turned toward Antoine and Philip. "Sir Edward's one of those aristocratic country gentlemen of the old school who have a very precise idea of the methods that should be observed in foreign relations. He deals with the ministers of foreign governments, not through official channels, but as one gentleman dealing with another. I know that he was profoundly shocked by the tone of the ultimatum. You have seen how he took action immediately and with the greatest firmness, how he remonstrated with Austria and advised the Servians to act with moderation. The fate of Europe lies, to some extent, in his hands—it could not be in better, more trustworthy hands."

"But," Studler broke in again, "Germany has met his suggestions with a point-blank refusal, and in that case—"

Rumelles cut in. at once. "The line taken by Germany, her attitude of cautious, very comprehensible neutrality, may have held up the first attempts at mediation made by England. But Sir Edward is sticking to his guns! There's no reason why I shouldn't tell youit

will appear in tomorrow morning's papers, if not this evening's—the Foreign Office is drawing up, in collaboration with the Quai d'Orsay, a new plan which may very well bring the conflict to a peaceful issue. Sir Edward is making proposals for a conference to take place immediately in London, between the German, French, and Italian ambassadors, at which all the matters in dispute will be threshed out."

"And meanwhile," Studler observed, "while all these shillyshallyings are going on, Austrian troops are pouring into Belgrade!"

Rumelles jerked up his head as if he had been stung. "I'm afraid, my dear sir, that your information is at fault on this matter as well. This show of military action notwithstanding, there's no proof as yet that what has happened up to now is more than window-dressing—as between Austria and Servia. I suspect you don't allow sufficient weight to a fact of capital importance: none of the European governments has been advised, through diplomatic channels, of a declaration of war. Another even more striking fact is that the Servian Ambassador to Austria had not left Vienna at noon today. And that's because he is acting as intermediary in an exchange of views between the two governments—a very good sign, you must admit. Negotiations are still in progress. In any case, even supposing diplomatic relations were broken off, even if Austria thought fit to declare war, I have reason to believe that Servia would yield to wiser counsels and refuse to embark on an unequal struggle—three hundred thousand men against a million and a half—and would withdraw her army without engaging battle. Don't forget," he added with a smile, "that until the guns speak, the last word rests with the diplomats."

Antoine's eyes met his brother's and caught a disrespectful gleam in them; obviously Jacques was not impressed by Rumelles's know-it-all manner.

"You might find it harder," Finazzi ventured to put in, "to take an optimistic view of Germany's present attitude."

"Why should I?" Rumelles threw a quick, scrutinizing glance at the oculist. "Of course, I don't deny that there are influences in Germany that make for war, but they're counterbalanced by other, weightier influences. The Kaiser's hasty return—he'll be at Kiel tonight—should modify the present trend of German foreign policy. Everyone knows that the Kaiser will take a determined stand against the risk of a European war. All his personal advisers are fervent advocates of peace. And among those of his entourage who have the greatest influence on him I count Prince Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador at the Court of St. James's. I had the advantage of seeing a good deal of him in London some years ago; he is a very levelheaded man, and just now in high favour at the German Court. You realize, of course, the serious consequences a war would have for Germany. With her frontiers blockaded, she would literally starve to death. Once the day came when the Germans could not get supplies of wheat and meat from Russia, how could they feed their army of four millions and a population of sixty-three millions? You can't keep hungry men alive with steel and coal and machinery!"

"What would prevent them from buying supplies abroad?" Studler suggested.

"This, my dear sir: they'd have to pay in gold for all they bought, as German paper money would soon lose its purchasing-power in other countries. Well, it's an easy calculation; we know the figures of the German gold reserve. In a few weeks Germany would have used up all her gold, and that would mean starvation."

Dr. Philip greeted the remark with a snorting little chuckle.

"Don't you agree with me, Professor?" Rumelles asked in a tone of polite surprise.

"Of course, of course," Philip said good-humouredly. "Only I can't help wondering if that isn't …just one way of looking at it."

Antoine could not repress a smile. Often in the past he had heard his "chief" employ that rather cryptic phrase. "That's one way of looking at it" was Philip's civil subterfuge for telling someone he was talking nonsense.

"What I've just said," Rumelles went on in a confident tone, "is borne out by every expert on the subject. Even the German economists have recognized that there's no solution to the problem of provisioning their country in case of war."

Roy broke in excitedly. "Yes, and that's why the German General Staff declares that Germany's one chance is a lightning victory. If that can be staved off, even for a few weeks, Germany will be forced to throw in her hand. That's common knowledge."

"And she can't be feeling too easy about her allies," Dr. Thérivier rumbled in his beard, with a broad grin. "Her dear friend Italy, for instance."

"Yes," Rumelles agreed, "Italy seems quite determined to stay neutral."

"And the Austrian army is—a washout!" Roy exclaimed with a scornful grimace and a contemptuous wave of his hand over his shoulder.

"Yes, gentlemen!" Rumelles seemed rather gratified by these interruptions. "Let's not exaggerate the danger! Listen! Without divulging any state secret, I think I may tell you this. At St. Petersburg, at this very hour, an interview is taking place between the Foreign Minister, M. Sazonov, and the Austrian Ambassador, an interview of which great things are hoped. Well, doesn't the mere fact that a friendly discussion of this sort has been consented to by both parties prove a common wish to avoid any recourse to arms P Then again, we know that efforts in favour of peace are being made by America and by the Pope."

"You don't mean to say so! By the Pope!" Philip exclaimed with an air of perfect gravity.

"Why, yes, the Pope!" Roy echoed. Sitting astride his chair, his chin propped on his folded arms, he was taking in Rumelles's remarks, not missing a single word.

Philip was careful not to smile, but there was a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "So the Pope is going to save the situation!" he remarked. Then he added: "I'm afraid that, too, is only one way of looking at it."

"Perhaps," Rumelles said, "there's more in it than you think, Professor. A definite veto from His Holiness would be enough to stop old Franz Josef from moving and send the Austrian army scuttling back behind their frontier. All the legations are aware of it. At this moment the Vatican is a perfect hotbed of intrigue. Which group will win? Will the minority in favour of a war persuade the Pope to keep from making any protest? Or will the peace-loving majority persuade him to intervene?"

Studler grinned. "What a pity we've given up having an ambassador at the Vatican! He might have advised His Holiness to take a peep at the Gospels for a change!"

This time Philip smiled broadly.

Rumelles observed him with a faint, slightly superior frown. "I can see, sir, that you're sceptical about the influence of the Pope."

"The Chief is always sceptical," Antoine put in lightly, and his eyes lingered on his old teacher with a look of affectionate respect, in which there was a nuance of complicity.

Philip turned toward him, puckering his eyelids roguishly. “My dear Thibault,” he said, “I must confess—though it’s probably a horrid symptom of senile decay—that I find it harder and harder to form a view about anything. I don’t suppose there’s anything that I’ve heard proved to me, the opposite of which might not have been proved by somebody else on equally conclusive evidence. Perhaps that’s what you call my ‘scepticism.’ In the present case, however, you’re quite mistaken. I bow to the superior competence of M. Rumelles, and I appreciate to the full the force of his arguments.”

“Still …” Antoine began laughingly.

Philip smiled. “Still”—he rubbed his hands vigorously together—“at my age it’s hard to count on reason vanquishing stupidity. If things have come to such a pass that peace hangs only on the good sense of a group of men, well, peace is in a very bad way, that’s obvious. All the same,” he went on at once, “that’s no reason for standing by idly. I thoroughly approve of it if our statesmen are sparing no efforts… . That’s the right way to tackle things—as if there was always something to be done. It’s our method in medicine, isn’t it, Thibault?”

Manuel Roy was playing with his small moustache; nothing bored him more than the old professor’s antiquated homilies.

Equally nettled by Philip’s academic scepticism, Rumelles was looking persistently in Antoine’s direction; no sooner did he catch his eye than he made a sign to remind him of the real object of his visit: the injection.

But just then Manuel Roy turned to Rumelles and blurted out: “The shocking thing is that, if, in spite of all you mention, the storm should break, France isn’t prepared. It would be a very different matter if we had first-rate, definitely superior armaments at our disposal.”

Rumelles bridled up. “Who says we’re not prepared?”

“Well, it seems to me that Humbert’s disclosures in the Senate three weeks ago were pretty definite.”

Rumelles faintly shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, come now! Those disclosures, as you call them, made by M. Humbert, were common knowledge, really; they’re far from having the importance lent them by a certain section of the press. Surely you aren’t innocent enough to think the French infantryman will go to war barefooted, like the army of the Revolution.”

“I didn’t refer to their boots. I was thinking of our heavy artillery, for instance… .”

“Do you know that many experts, and not the least competent, absolutely deny the efficiency of those long-range guns the Germans are so keen on? It’s like those famous machine-guns of theirs, cumbrous weapons that slow up the progress of their infantry.”

“What exactly is a machine-gun?” Antoine asked.

Rumelles laughed. “It’s a cross between a rifle and that infernal machine Fieschi invented—do you remember?—which so signally failed to kill King Louis-Philippe. They’re terrifying weapons—on paper or at a shooting-range. But in the field—that’s another story. It seems they jam for the least grain of dust.”

Turning to Roy, he went on in a more serious tone. “According to our experts, what really counts is field-artillery. And ours, let me tell you, is vastly superior to the Germans’. We have more 75’s than they have 77’s, and our 75 is the far better weapon of the two. Don’t you worry, young man. The truth is that during the last three years France has made great strides. All the problems of concentration, the working of our railway system in wartime, and supplies, have been solved. If we’ve got to go to war, believe me, France is in an excellent position. And our allies are aware of it.”

“That’s just what makes the danger!” Studler muttered.

Rumelles shot the Caliph a supercilious glance, as if he failed to see the sense of the remark. It was Jacques who pressed the point home. “It might be better for us, I agree, if Russia did not just now place too great a confidence in the French army.”

True to his resolve, he had so far listened in silence. But he was chafing under his self-restraint. What seemed to him the dominating factor—the antiwar movement of the masses—had not been even touched on. Hastily he took stock of his feelings and made sure he had self-control enough to maintain the tone of speculative detachment which seemed the rule among this group. Then he turned to the politician. “You were reviewing just now the reasons for not losing confidence.” His voice was calm, collected. “Don’t you think we should reckon as one of the main factors that make for peace the active opposition of the pacifist groups?” His eyes swept Antoine’s face, caught a hint of apprehension on it, then came back to Rumelles. “We shouldn’t forget that at the present moment there are ten or twelve million internationalists in Europe who, should the threat of war become more urgent, are determined to prevent their governments from letting themselves be drawn into a war.”

Rumelles heard him out without a flicker of the eyelids, watching the speaker’s face attentively. When he replied, the studied calmness of his voice did not exclude an undertone of irony. “I am not inclined to attach as much importance as you do to these mass movements. Further, I’d have you note that the demonstrations of patriotic enthusiasm in the various capitals are far more numerous and impressive than the meetings of protest organized by a handful of objectors. Last night in Berlin a procession a million strong marched through the city, booed the Russian embassy, sang the ‘Wacht am Rhein’ outside the palace, and covered the Bismarck monument with flowers. Mind you, I don’t deny the existence of certain antiwar parties, but their activities are purely negative.”

“Negative!” Studler cried. “No threat of war has ever before raised such a storm of protest among the working-class.”

“What exactly do you mean by ‘negative’?” Jacques asked in a calm tone.

“Well”—Rumelles paused as if to choose his words—-“by ‘negative’ I mean that the parties you refer to, the groups hostile to any notion of a war, are not large or disciplined enough, nor—internationally speaking—sufficiently coherent, to constitute a force that need be seriously reckoned with.”

“Twelve million men,” Jacques repeated.

“Twelve million men, perhaps, but most of them are merely people enrolled in some union or other, who pay their contribution to a common fund. How many real, active militants are there among them? And even among those militants there are a great many who would respond to patriotic appeals. In some countries, possibly, these revolutionary parties might be capable of placing certain obstacles in the way of their governments, but such obstacles would be merely tentative and would have short shrift in any case. That type of obstruction only lasts as long as the powers that be permit it. If the situation became critical, the government involved would only have to put the screws on liberalism to abate the nuisance, as the lawyers say! It wouldn’t even be necessary to declare martial law. No, so far, international socialism can’t be regarded as a power capable of making any effective stand against the wishes of a government. And it’s not in the midst of a crisis that the extremists could fix up any organized resistance on the spur of the moment. No,” he said with a smile, “it’s too late—for this time, anyhow!”

"Unless," Jacques retorted, "those elements of opposition, which lie low when things go well, should, under pressure of the crisis, be goaded into violent action and prove invincible! Just now, don't you think the outbreak of strikes in Russia is holding up the Tsarist government?"

"You're wrong there," Rumelles calmly replied. "Let me tell you, such views are out of date—by twenty-four hours! The latest dispatches are, I'm glad to say, quite definite: the revolutionary movement in St. Petersburg has been crushed—brutally, but once for all."

He was still smiling, as if to excuse himself for being perpetually right. Then, glancing at Antoine, he raised his arm, bringing his wristwatch into prominence. "My dear doctor, I'm afraid my time is nearly up."

"Right you are," said Antoine, rising to his feet.

He was not sorry to see the argument ended thus abruptly, for he feared Jacques's reactions.

While Rumelles was bidding good-bye to those present with studied courtesy, Antoine went up to his brother, taking an envelope from his pocket.

"Here's the letter for the lawyer. I've not sealed the envelope. Well, what did you think of Rumelles?" he added in an absent-minded tone.

"He looks his part," Jacques answered with a smile.

Antoine seemed preoccupied with some thought he was reluctant to express. After a quick glance round to make sure there was no one within hearing, he said hastily, lowering his voice, in a would-be detached tone: "By the way—supposing there's a war? You've been excused from your military service, haven't you? But—if there's a mobilization …?"

Jacques gazed at him for a moment without answering. It had just struck him that Jenny was sure to ask the same question.

Then he rapped out his reply: "I'll never let myself be mobilized."

Antoine, feeling ill at ease, had kept his eyes fixed on Rumelles; he did not seem to have heard the remark.

The brothers parted without exchanging another word.

# Chapter XVII

"THOSE hypodermic injections of yours are simply marvellous!" Rumelles observed as soon as they were alone. "I already feel ever so much better. It's no longer such an effort to get up in the morning, and my appetite's coming back."

"No fever of an evening? No dizzy spells?"

"None whatever."

"In that case we can safely increase the dose."

The walls of the room they entered, next to the consulting-room, were tiled in white porcelain. There was an operating-table in the middle, and on this Rumelles stretched himself submissively after taking off his coat and waistcoat.

Antoine, with his back turned, stood beside the sterilizer, preparing the injection. "What you say is pretty encouraging," he remarked in a pensive voice.

Rumelles glanced round, wondering if the allusion was to the state of his health or to the political situation.

"That being so," Antoine proceeded, "why do they let the papers keep harping on Germany's alleged double-dealing and her aggressive designs?"

"They don't 'let them,' they encourage them to do so. It's up to us, you see, to prepare public opinion for every emergency."

He spoke in a gloomy tone of voice. When Antoine turned toward him, Rumelles had laid aside his cocksure expression. There was a strained, far-away look in his eyes.

"To prepare public opinion?" Antoine repeated. "They'll never make this country believe that the interests of Servia should be allowed to involve us in serious complications."

"Public opinion!" Rumelles exclaimed with a contemptuous grimace. "My dear man, with a little gumption and a judicious selection of the news permitted to leak out, three days would be enough for us to bring about a complete reversal of feeling *in either direction!* The majority of the French people, moreover, have always felt flattered by the Franco-Russian Alliance. It would be easy to play upon that chord again."

"I'm not so sure of that," Antoine remarked as he drew nearer.

With a wad steeped in ether he swabbed the place for the injection, and with a quick stab thrust the needle deep into the muscle. Silently he watched the level of the liquid sinking in the syringe. At last he withdrew the needle.

"The French," he went on, "welcomed the Franco-Russian Alliance enthusiastically, but this is the first time they've been called upon to ask themselves how far they are committed… . Don't get up for a minute or two. … I often wonder what there really is in our treaties with Russia. No one knows anything about it."

It was a roundabout way of asking a question, but Rumelles answered it readily enough. "I'm not in the secrets of the gods," he said, propping himself on his elbow. "All I really know is departmental hearsay. There were two preliminary agreements, in 1891 and 1892, and after that a regular Treaty of Alliance which Casimir-Perier signed in 1894. I'm not acquainted with all its terms, but—this is not a state secret—France and Russia are pledged to give each other military assistance in the event of either being threatened by Germany. Since then we've had M. Delcassé, we've had M. Poincaré and his trips to Russia. All of which must obviously have defined and emphasized our commitments."

"That being so," Antoine observed, "if Russia were now to intervene against the German policy, it would be Russia threatening Germany, and under the treaty we shouldn't be bound to come in."

Rumelles made a fleeting grimace intended for a smile. "It's not so simple as all that, my dear fellow," he said. "Supposing Russia, as the out-and-out champion of the Southern Slavs, were to break with Austria tomorrow and mobilize in defence of Servia, then Germany, being bound by her treaty of 1879 with Austria, would have to mobilize against Russia. The mere fact of that mobilization would oblige France to implement her pledge to Russia and mobilize immediately against Germany, as threatening our ally. One thing follows the other automatically."

"So, according to you, that precious Franco-Russian friendship, which our politicians prided themselves upon as a guarantee of security, now proves to work in the opposite direction. To be not a guarantee of peace, but an instrument of war!"

"It's all very well to blame the politicians… . But remember what France's situation in Europe was in 1890. Was it a mistake for our statesmen to give their country a weapon that cuts both ways, rather than leave her entirely defenceless?"

The argument struck Antoine as being a piece of special pleading, but he found no ready answer to it. His knowledge of contemporary history was very sketchy. And, besides, all this was only of retrospective interest. "Be that as it may," he observed, "at the moment, if I understand you properly, our fate is entirely in the hands of Russia. Or, to be more precise," he added after a moment's hesitation, "everything depends on our loyalty to the Franco-Russian Alliance. Is that right?"

Rumelles again gave a brief, sub-acid smile. "As to that, my dear fellow, don't bamboozle yourself into imagining we could wriggle out of our obligations. It's Berthelot who's in charge of our foreign policy just now. So long as he remains in office, with M. Poincaré behind him, you may be sure our loyalty to our allies can never be in doubt." He hesitated, then went on: "This was made quite clear, I'm told, at the Cabinet Council held after von Schoen's unspeakable proposal."

"In that case," Antoine exclaimed testily, "if there's no chance of shaking off our Russian incubus, the only thing to do is to compel Russia to remain neutral!"

"How do you propose to do that?" asked Rumelles, his blue eyes fixed on Antoine. "And, anyway, how do we know it's not too late?" he muttered. There was a short silence before he spoke again. "In Russia, the military party is all-powerful. The drubbing they received in the Japanese war has left the Russian Staff with an itch for getting even with someone, and they've never forgotten the rap over the knuckles Austria gave them when she annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. People like M. Isvolsky—who, by the way, is due to arrive in Paris this afternoon—make little attempt to conceal the fact that they want a European war so as to be able to shift the Russian frontier right down to Constantinople. It would suit their purposes to postpone that war until Franz Josef's death, and if possible till 1917, but obviously, if an opportunity arose before …"

He spoke quickly, breathlessly, and his look grew suddenly downcast. An anxious frown settled on his brows. It was as if he had thrown off the mask at last.

"Yes, my dear fellow, frankly, I'm beginning to despair. Just now, in the presence of your friends, I of course had to put up a bold front. But the truth is that things look black. So black, indeed, that the Foreign Minister's given up the idea of travelling on to Denmark with the President and is returning post-haste to France. The midday dispatches haven't improved prospects. Instead of falling in with Sir Edward Grey's suggestions, Germany does nothing but quibble, raise frivolous objections, and seems bent on scuttling the proposal for arbitration. Does she really want to bring things to a head, or is it that she objects to a conference of the four great powers because she knows beforehand that, owing to the strained relations between Austria and Italy, Austria would inevitably be condemned in such a court by a majority of three to one? The latter is the least invidious as well as the more likely supposition. But meanwhile events are moving fast. Military precautions are already being taken everywhere."

"Military precautions?"

"That was inevitable. Every nation naturally has in mind the possibility of mobilization and is preparing for it on the off chance. In Belgium an extraordinary cabinet meeting was held this very day, with M. de Broqueville in the chair; it had all the appearances of a precautionary council of war. It's proposed to call up three classes of conscripts so as to be able to have an additional hundred thousand men in the firing-line. With us it's the same story. At the Quai d'Orsay, this morning, a cabinet council was held, at which, as a measure of precaution, the advisability of preparing for war was considered. At Toulon and Brest the fleet has been ordered to stand by. Instructions have been cabled to Morocco for fifty battalions of native troops to be transported to France immediately. And so forth. Every government is taking the same line, and that's how the situation is growing worse and worse automatically. For there's not an expert on the Staff but knows that when once you've started off that infernal machinery of general mobilization, it becomes a physical impossibility to slow down the process and wait upon events. Thus the most peaceful-minded of governments are confronted with a terrible dilemma: either they embark on a war, for the simple reason that they've been preparing for it, or else …"

"Why not issue counter-orders, throw the gears into reverse, and put a stop to the whole business?"

"Quite so. But in that case you must be absolutely certain that you won't have to mobilize again for many months to come." "Why?"

"Because—and this is another axiom never called in question by the experts—a sudden stoppage jams every cogwheel of the intricate war-machine and puts it out of commission for months. What government, I ask you, can feel certain just now that there'll be no need to mobilize in the immediate future?"

Antoine remained speechless, gazing at Rumelles in dismay. At last he said under his breath: "It's a damnable business!"

"And the worst of it is that underneath the surface there may be nothing more than a colossal gamble. What's going on in Europe at present may be no more than a gigantic game of poker, with every player trying to put through a bluff. While Austria's strangling treacherous Servia on the side, big brother Germany takes a blustering attitude, for no other purpose, maybe, than to forestall Russian action and a conciliatory intervention on the part of the powers. Just like poker: the fellow who keeps up the stoutest and the longest bluff takes the pool. The trouble is that, as in poker, no one can tell what proportion of trickery and what of genuine aggressive intent there may be at the moment in Germany's attitude or in Russia's. Hitherto the Russians have always given way to German effrontery. So of course Germany and Austria think themselves justified in assuming that, provided they put up a good bluff, provided they seem determined to go the limit, Russia will back down. But then again it may be that, just because she has always had to give way, Russia may really throw her sword into the scales this time."

"A damnable business," Antoine repeated. Gloomily he placed the syringe in the sterilizer, then took a few steps toward the window. Confronted with Rumelles's description of the European scene, he felt all the mental anguish of a passenger who in the midst of a hurricane should suddenly discover that all the ship's officers had taken leave of their senses.

A pause fell on their conversation.

Rumelles had risen to his feet. He was adjusting his braces. Unconsciously he looked round, as though to make sure of not being overheard, and moved a step nearer to Antoine.

"Look here, Thibault," he said, lowering his voice, "I oughtn't to disclose these matters, but you as a doctor can keep a secret, I suppose." He looked Antoine squarely in the eyes; Antoine nodded without a word. "Well, what's going on in Russia is simply unthinkable! His Excellency M. Sazonov has as good as warned us in advance that his government means to turn down any attempt at mediation. And as a matter of fact we have just received extremely grave news from St. Petersburg. Russia's intentions are no longer a matter of doubt. Mobilization over there is already in full swing. The summer manoeuvres have been cut short, the troops have returned post-haste to their garrisons; in the four chief Russian commands—Moscow, Kiev, Kazan, and Odessa—every regiment is on a war footing. It was yesterday, the twenty-fifth, or perhaps even the day before, at a council of war, that the Staff managed to extort from the Tsar written orders to prepare in all haste, 'as a preventive measure,' for an attack on Austria. Germany is undoubtedly aware of this and it's quite enough to account for the way she's behaving. She too is mobilizing secretly, and she is, I fear, only too well justified in doing so. What's more, she has just taken a step of the gravest importance. She has warned St. Petersburg publicly today that unless these military preparations of Russia are at once cut short—and all the more, of course, should they be speeded up—she will feel obliged to decree her own mobilization. And that, as she says in good set terms, would mean a world war. What will Russia's answer be? Her responsibility is heavy enough already, but it will be crushing if she declines to give way. And it's unlikely, to say the least of it, that she will give way."

"But what of us, meanwhile?"

"What of us, my dear fellow? What of us? What would you have us do? Let Russia down? That would merely demoralize our own public on the very eve of the day when we shall stand in need of all our strength, of all our national enthusiasm. Let Russia down and stand entirely alone? Quarrel with our one and only ally? Make England turn away in disgust from the Franco-Russian combination and compel her government to declare in favour of the Central Powers?"

Two gentle taps at the door cut him short. Léon's voice was heard in the passage outside: "You're wanted again on the telephone, sir."

Antoine made an impatient gesture. "Say I'm … no," he called out, "I'll answer it myself." And, turning to Rumelles: "You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"By all means, my dear doctor. Besides, it's awfully late, I must be going. Good-bye."

Antoine hastened to his study and unhooked the receiver. "Well, what is it?"

The harshness of his tone gave Anne a shock. "Sorry," she said contritely. "I'd forgotten it was Sunday. I suppose you've friends with you this afternoon."

"Well, what is it?" he repeated.

"I only wanted … Sure I'm not disturbing you?"

Antoine made no reply.

"I wanted …" She felt his nerves so much on edge that she floundered for her words, could not concoct a lie. Timidly, finding nothing better to say, she whispered: "Tonight?"

"Quite impossible," he replied curtly. Then he added in a gentler tone: "Nothing doing tonight, darling, I'm afraid."

Suddenly he felt sorry for her. At the other end of the line Anne somehow grew aware of his changed mood, with a little thrill of mingled pain and pleasure.

"Do be reasonable!" he said. (She could hear him sigh.) "For one thing, I'm not free. And even if I were, I wouldn't feel like a festive evening, considering the state of things."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Really, Anne, you read the papers, don't you? Surely you know what's happening?"

She straightened up. The papers? Politics? Was he thrusting her out of his life for such futilities? … She jumped to the conclusion that he was lying.

"Tonight, at our place—really, really can't you manage it?"

"No. I probably shan't get home till late—dead tired, what's more. It's quite true, darling. Please don't insist." He added rather lamely: "Tomorrow, very likely. I'll ring you up tomorrow, if I can. *Au revoir*, Anne dear."

He hung up immediately.

# Chapter XVIII

Jacques had left without waiting for his brother to reappear. In fact, when the Fontanins' concierge told him that Jenny had been back for more than an hour, he regretted having wasted so much of his time on Antoine's friends. He ran up the steps, three at a time, and rang the bell. With a wildly beating heart he listened for the sound of Jenny's footsteps behind the door, but it was her voice that he heard first.

"Who is it?"

"Jacques."

There was a rattle of bolts and chains and at last the door opened.

"Mother has left Paris," she said, to account for the locked door. "I've just been seeing her off."

She lingered in the doorway as if, now that she had to let him enter, she were feeling ill at ease. But then he gazed into her eyes with such frank delight, such loyalty, that all her qualms were dust before the wind. He had come to see her; yesterday's dream was continuing today!

He held out both arms to her with unthinking fervour, and with the same spontaneity she gave him both her hands. Then stepping back two paces, her hands still clasped in his, she drew him across the threshold.

While waiting for Jacques's coming, she had wondered into which room to show him. The drawing-room was all slip-covered, and she always felt scruples about taking anyone into her bedroom; it was her place of refuge, her sanctum, and even Daniel rarely entered it. The only other rooms available were Daniel's and Mme. de Fontanin's; the latter was the one in which she and her mother usually sat. Finally Jenny had decided on her brother's room.

"Let's go to Daniel's den," she said. "It's the only cool place in the apartment."

As she had not yet bought a mourning costume of light material, she wore in the apartment an old white serge summer frock, open at the neck, which carried a suggestion of vernal lawns, open-air games. Though she had small hips and long, slim legs she did not give an impression of being particularly supple, for instinctively she held herself in and walked with calculated stiffness; yet all the same, despite her self-restraint, the litheness of youth showed through in every movement of her slender body.

As he followed Jenny, Jacques's attention strayed; he could not keep himself from gazing with emotion at this well-remembered setting: the hall with its Dutch cupboard and the delf plates above each doorway; the grey corridor wall on which Mme. de Fontanin had hung her son's first charcoal sketches; the cupboard with a red window which the children had used as a darkroom; and Daniel's room, his bookshelves, his old alabaster clock, and the two little armchairs, upholstered in darkred velvet, in which he and his friend had so often talked the hours away.

"Mother left this afternoon." To hide her shyness, Jenny busied herself pulling up the blind. "She's gone to Vienna."

"Where?"

"To Vienna. Do sit down." She turned, but failed to notice Jacques's consternation.

On the previous night, to her surprise, she had not been asked to explain why she was so late. Mme. de Fontanin had been too busy getting things ready for her journey (she had not dared to start packing while Daniel was about) to look at the clock during her daughter's absence. So Jenny had not needed to give any explanations; it was her mother who, rather ashamed at having kept it back so long, had hastily confessed that she was leaving for ten days, to "settle things" on the spot.

"To Vienna!" Jacques repeated, without sitting down. "And you didn't try to stop her?"

Jenny gave him an outline of the conversation, explaining how, when she began to raise objections, her mother had cut her short and insisted that a personal visit to Vienna was the one way of straightening out the tangle their affairs were in.

Jacques's eyes rested affectionately on her face while she spoke. She was sitting at Daniel's desk, holding herself very straight, with a calm, rather aloof expression. The set of her mouth, the lips that hardly parted ("too schooled to silence" was Jacques's thought), indicated firmness of will and self-composure. There was something rather strained in her whole demeanour, and in her watchful gaze a stubborn reticence. Was it pride, he wondered, or mistrust? Or was it only shyness? No, none of these, he decided, for he knew her well enough to recognize that stiffness as habitual with her; it expressed one side of her temperament, the self-imposed reserve that had become second nature for her.

He had qualms about telling her point-blank the reasons why a stay in Austria was ill-advised at the moment and prudently inquired: "Did your brother know she was planning this trip?"

"No."

"Ah, that explains it!" He had suddenly decided to speak out. "Daniel would have put his foot down if he'd known, I'm certain. Doesn't your mother know that Austria is mobilizing, that the frontiers are under military surveillance, that martial law may be declared in Austria at any moment?"

It was Jenny's turn to show consternation. For the past week she had hardly glanced at a newspaper. In a few words Jacques explained what had been happening.

He spoke circumspectly, taking care to keep to actual facts, without alarming her unduly. The questions she put him evinced a trace of incredulity and brought it home to him how little such political concerns entered into her life. The possibility of a war, one of those wars described in history books, seemed to present no terrors to her, or next to none. It did not even enter her head that, if war broke out, Daniel would from the outset be in serious danger. All that troubled her was the thought of the inconveniences to which her mother might be exposed.

"It's quite likely," Jacques hastened to explain, "that Mme. de Fontanin will give up her plan before she reaches the frontier. You may see her back here at any moment."

"At any moment!" Jenny exclaimed, colouring.

She confessed to him that, to tell the truth, she had felt rather relieved by her mother's departure; it put back the trying hour of explanations. Not, she hastened to explain, that she feared encountering her mother's disapproval. But there was nothing she disliked

more than having to talk about herself, to lay bare her inmost feelings. “Don’t forget, Jacques,” she said, with an earnest look toward him, “where my feelings are concerned, I like people to read between the lines.”

“So do I!” Jacques laughed.

The conversation took a more intimate turn. He questioned her about herself, urged her to give details, helped her to analyse her sentiments. She submitted to it readily enough, and did not balk at his questions. Gradually she came to feel a sort of gratitude to him for having put them. To her surprise, she found a certain pleasure in casting off, for his sake, her wonted reticence. For until that day no one had ever gazed at her with such compelling fervour in his eyes; no one had even spoken to her with such care not to hurt her feelings, with so obvious a will to understand. She felt a gentle warmth, unknown till now, stealing over her; it was as if hitherto she had led a cloistered life and suddenly the barriers had fallen, revealing a radiant, undreamed-of landscape.

At every moment, for no reason, Jacques would smile, not so much for Jenny’s benefit as from inward joy. He was still quite dazed with happiness; Europe had vanished from his thoughts and nothing existed now but him and her. Everything that Jenny said, the most trivial remark, seemed another token of her trust and faithfulness, thrilling him with a sense of boundless gratitude. A new conviction was striking root in his mind, filling him with pride: their love was not merely something rare and precious, but an adventure without precedent; more than exceptional—unique. The word “soul” rose to their lips time after time and each time that vague, mysteriously emotive word seemed to rouse answering echoes, charged with overtones of meaning, secrets unguessed by any save themselves.

“Do you know what surprises me most?” he suddenly exclaimed. “It’s that I feel so little surprise. I feel as if, deep down in me, I’d always, always known this was to happen.”

“I’m not surprised, either.”

It was equally untrue for both of them, yet the more they thought about it, the more they grew convinced that never for a single day had either abandoned hope.

“And I find it so natural, my being here,” he went on. “I’ve the impression, at your side, of being in my usual, appointed place.”

“So have I.”

For both of them it was a delicious temptation, to which they yielded at every moment, to feel themselves in unison, to declare themselves at one in everything.

She had moved to another chair and was now sitting in front of him in an almost languorous attitude. Already love seemed to be changing her whole appearance, making itself visible in her bearing, lending her a grace, an ease that she had never had before. Jacques watched the transformation with enchanted eyes. His gaze lingered like a caress on the play of shadows on her neck and shoulders, the ripple of the muscles under the light frock, the rise and fall of her breast. And he could never feast his eyes enough on the charming picture offered by her slender hands restlessly fluttering like two amorous white doves—nestling together, drawing apart, hovering till they locked again. She had small, round, amply moulded nails—“like half-kernels of hazel-nuts,” he told himself.

He bent toward her. “Do you know, I’m discovering lots of the most wonderful things!”

“What things?”

Listening, she had rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and propped her chin on the palm of her right hand, her fingers cupping the curve of her .cheek. Sometimes her forefinger idly toyed with her lips, then again strayed upward to her brows.

He brought his eyes near hers. “Do you know, by daylight your eyes look like sparkling jewels, pale-blue sapphires?”

With an embarrassed smile she bent her head. Then straightening up again, she returned his scrutiny and, as if teasingly to turn the tables, began studying his appearance with no less care. “And it seems to me, Jacques, you’ve changed since yesterday.”

“Changed?”

“Yes. A lot!” She seemed disposed to keep her secret to herself and it was only after he had plied her with questions that, by way of shy approximations and phrases timidly let fall, he elicited what she had not dared to say openly: ever since Jacques had come, she had been feeling that something was weighing on his mind, something that had nothing to do with their love.

With a quick gesture he pushed back the lock of hair that dangled over his forehead. “Listen!” he said abruptly. “I’ll tell you exactly how I’ve spent my time since yesterday.”

He described to her his night in the Tuileries Gardens, his morning at the newspaper office, his visit to Antoine, adding detail to detail, with the novelist’s delight in drawing an apt picture of scenes and people. He retailed what Stefany and Gallot, Philip and Rumelles, had said, and explained his own reactions. He told her of his fears and hopes, and tried to give her an idea of the part he was playing in the struggle to avert a war.

She listened breathlessly, without missing a word but feeling hopelessly at sea. It was as if she were plunged headlong, not merely into the midst of Jacques’s existence but into the vortex of the European crisis, and confronted with terrifying issues such as she had never dreamed of. The whole social structure seemed to be tottering, and a feeling of panic came over her, the panic of those who in an earthquake see tumbling about their heads the walls and roofs which had seemed until then so safe and solid.

She gathered only a partial impression of the role that Jacques was actually playing in what had been to her till today an unknown world, but she felt bound to assign him an exalted place, to justify her love. She felt assured that his aims were lofty and that the men whom he mentioned by name—men like Meynestrel, Stefany, and Jaurés—were worthy of exceptional esteem. Their ideals must be praiseworthy, since they were Jacques’s ideals, too.

Jenny’s attention was like strong wine to Jacques; he let himself go wholeheartedly. “Revolutionists like us …” he said.

She looked up quickly and he caught a gleam of wonder in her eyes. It was the first time she had heard “revolutionists” spoken of in an approving tone, with an almost religious deference. The term had always conjured up to her pictures of a ruffianly mob out to burn and pillage the homes of the rich, so as to gratify their basest instincts; of desperadoes with bombs concealed beneath their coats, to cope with whom society’s one arm was stern repression.

Jacques began to speak to her of socialism and of his reasons for joining the Socialist International. “Don’t imagine it was an impulse of blind philanthropy that swept me into the revolutionary movement. No, I went through a long phase of doubt, of spiritual loneliness—a terrible time! In the old days when you knew me, I firmly believed in human brotherhood, the victory of truth and justice, but I then had the notion that they would triumph easily and quickly. A fool’s paradise, as I very soon found out, and then everything seemed to go dark inside me. That was the most appalling period of my life; I let myself sink, I touched the lowest depth

of despair. Well, it was the revolutionary ideal that saved me then." With a rush of gratitude he remembered Meynestrel. "That ideal broadened my horizon—radiantly! It gave an incentive for living to the futile, undisciplined youngster I'd been from my schooldays on. I realized that it was absurd to fancy justice would triumph easily or quickly, but that there was a practical way of showing my belief in the triumph of justice, that my instinct of revolt might serve a useful purpose if it joined forces with other rebellious spirits like mine for the betterment of mankind."

She listened without interrupting. In any case her Protestant upbringing had predisposed her to the notion that the social system should not be cramped by strict conventions and that it is the duty of the individual to exalt his personality, carrying to its utmost consequences any line of action that his conscience bids him follow. Behind Jenny's silence Jacques discerned the workings of a keenly alert intelligence, sound and well balanced though, naturally enough, unused to tackling speculative problems. She could, he felt, rise clear of prejudices, and under her reserve was a highly strung, sensitive nature that would readily espouse and serve a noble cause once she had judged it worthy of her life's devotion.

Nevertheless, she could not repress an incredulous, almost disapproving glance when Jacques proceeded to inform her that the capitalist system, under which in all innocence she lived, was a consecration of the most heinous injustice. Though she had not thought much about it, she accepted the inequalities of the human lot as a natural outcome of the inequalities of human nature.

"Oh, Jenny," Jacques exclaimed, "I'm sure you have no idea what the life of the world's underdogs is really like! If you had, you wouldn't shake your head like that. You don't realize that quite near you there are thousands and thousands of miserable people whose lives are a never-ending round of toil, who bow their necks beneath an iron yoke without a decent wage, without security for the future, without a gleam of hope! You know that coal is dug out of the earth, that goods are made in factories, but do you ever think about the millions of men who spend their lives half suffocated in the darkness of the mines? Do you think of the men whose nerves are worn to shreds by the ear-splitting din of factory machines? Or even of those relatively favoured farm labourers who drudge their lives out for as many as fourteen hours a day, according to the season, only to sell the produce of their never-ending toil to some middleman who haggles over every penny? That's what a workingman's life means.

"Don't think I'm exaggerating; I speak of what I've seen with my own eyes. In Hamburg, to keep myself alive, I had to work as a dockhand, with a hundred other poor devils in the same plight as myself—starving, that's to say. For three weeks I was at the beck and call of those modern slavedrivers they call foremen, bawling at us: 'Lift that there plank, you! Carry those bags! Get a move on with them barrows, damn you!' from morn till night. When the day's work was over and we'd drawn our scanty pay, we flung ourselves like wolves on food and strong drink; every limb ached, we were covered with filth, our bodies empty, our minds empty; we were too fagged out even to rebel against it all. That, perhaps, is the most horrible thing about it: these poor devils haven't any idea that they are the victims of social injustice. The wonder is how they bring themselves to endure, as if it were the normal thing, a life that's horrible as a convict's. I managed to escape from that hell on earth because I had the luck of knowing several languages and could turn my hand to journalism. But what about the others? They're still sweating their souls out for a pittance… . Have we the right,

Jenny, to allow things like that to go on, to regard them as the normal lot of our fellow-men?

"Or take the factories! I worked at Fiume for a spell as machine-tender in a button-factory. I was the slave of a machine that had to be fed incessantly every ten seconds. Impossible to take your mind or hands off it for a single moment. For hours on end we went on making the same motion. It wasn't really tiring, I'll admit. But I assure you, I felt rottener mentally and physically after a spell at that machine than I'd ever felt in Hamburg after hauling bags of cement all day, with the lime-dust burning my eyes and throat. In an Italian soapworks I've seen women whose job it was to lift and carry, every ten minutes, cases of soap-flakes weighing eighty pounds; for the rest of the time they had to turn a handle which was so stiff they had to get a purchase with their feet against a wall to set it in motion. And they put in eight hours a day at that back-breaking job. I'm not inventing anything, mind you! I've seen with my own eyes, at a Prussian furrier's, girls of seventeen employed on brushing pelts who had to go out every few hours and vomit because their throats got full of hairs. Miserably paid, they were, what's more. Of course, that's the rule everywhere: women are always paid less than men for the same work."

"Why?" Jenny asked.

"Because it's assumed a woman has a father or a husband who contributes to her support."

"That's quite true, very often," she said.

"No, worse luck! If these wretched women are obliged to work, isn't it just because, under our present social system, a man can't earn enough to give a decent life to those dependent on him?

"I've been telling you about workers in foreign countries. As for France, you've only to go some morning to any of the industrial suburbs. A little before seven you'll see a long file of women coming to leave their children at the public *créche*, so as to be free to work all day at a factory. The factory managers who have organized these *créches*—at the expense of the business—are convinced, quite genuinely I expect, that they're doing a kindness to their employees. But try to picture what it's like, the life of a mother who, before putting

In her eight-hour day of manual toil, has to be up at five to make the coffee, wash and dress her children, tidy up the room a bit, and hurry to reach her work by seven. Isn't that absolutely scandalous? But, I assure you, that's how it is. And the capitalist system battens on those martyred lives. Tell me, Jenny, can we allow such things to be? Can we permit the system to go on thriving at the cost of all those millions of victims? Certainly not! But to bring in a new order the proletariat must take over. *Now* do you understand? That's the real meaning of the word which seems to frighten you so much, *revolution*. What's needed is a brand-new social system enabling men not merely to exist, but to *live*. We must give back to the individual not only his rightful share of the profits of industry, but the measure of liberty, well-being, leisure, without which he can't develop in an atmosphere of decent human self-respect."

"Of human self-respect," she repeated pensively. She was realizing now, for the first time, that she had reached her twenties in utter ignorance of the underworld of labour. Between the working-class and a young 1914 bourgeoise like herself, the wall of class was as solid as the caste barriers in certain ancient civilizations. Still, she reflected naively, all rich people aren't monsters of iniquity! She recalled the Protestant organizations to which her mother belonged and which dispensed charity to needy families. And now she blushed at the thought of it. Charity. She was aware that those poor folk who asked for alms had nothing in common with the

exploited working-class, who claimed their right to live, their right to independence, self-respect. Those plaintive paupers did not represent the "lower class," as she had stupidly imagined. They were only parasites, hangers-on of the prosperous middle class—almost as far removed from the proletariat Jacques had spoken of as from the kindly charity-dispensers befriending them. Jacques had revealed the proletariat to her.

"Human self-respect," she repeated for the second time and her tone showed she gave the words their fullest meaning.

"Of course," Jacques said, "the first results are bound to be disappointing. Once the revolution has set him free, the worker will, to begin with, make a dead set at the most selfish, not to say the basest, forms of satisfaction. We'll have to reckon with that, I'm afraid; men's lower instincts will need to be appeased before any real spiritual progress is feasible." After a moment's hesitation he added: "Before their souls become enlightened."

His voice had grown husky; an apprehension which he knew only too well gripped his throat. Nevertheless, he went on speaking. "Yes, I'm afraid we shall have to bow to the inevitable; the change of institutions will precede by far man's change of heart. But it wouldn't do—we haven't the right—to lose faith in human nature. I see its flaws quite clearly. But I believe, I *must* believe, that they're largely consequences of the present social order. Yes, we should close our ears to the insidious voice of pessimism, we must learn to believe in Man. There is, there surely must be, in Man a secret, ineradicable craving for what is noblest. And it's our task to fan that failing spark of aspiration hidden beneath the embers till it glows and some day, perhaps, bursts into a splendid flame."

She nodded emphatically; her expression was more decided than ever, her eyes calm and wide. He beamed with satisfaction.

"But the social changes will have to wait; for the moment we've a more urgent job on hand: to prevent war."

Suddenly he remembered his appointment with Stefany and glanced at the alabaster clock. It was not going. He pulled out his watch and jumped up hastily. "Good heavens, it's eight!" He seemed to waken from a dream. "And I'm due at the Bourse in a quarter of an hour's time."

It struck him that their conversation had taken an unexpectedly impersonal turn and, fearing it might have disappointed Jenny, he began to murmur excuses.

"No, no!" she broke in at once. "I want to hear your views on every subject, I want to know your life—to understand!" The fervour of her tone seemed to imply: by thus confiding in me, by showing yourself to me exactly as you are, you've given me the best possible proof of your love, the proof I most appreciate.

"Tomorrow," he said as he moved toward the door, "I'll come earlier—immediately after lunch. Will that suit you?"

The blue depths of her eyes gleamed with a glad, responsive light. She would have liked to say: "Yes, come as soon as you possibly can. I feel alive only when you are with me." But she said nothing, though a flush rose to her cheeks as she got up and followed him.

The drawing-room door stood ajar. He paused in front of it. "May I have a peep? That room brings back so many memories."

The shutters were closed; she went in ahead of him and threw a window open. She had a way of her own of walking, of crossing a room, moving straight to the point where she had something to do, unhurrying, with gentle but inflexible determination.

A mingled scent of beeswax and upholstery rose from the parquet floor, the rolled-up carpets and curtains stacked in piles. Jacques took it all in, smiling. A picture rose before him of the first time he had entered this room with Antoine. Jenny had taken offence at his remarks, had gone to the window and leaned on the balcony rail, while he had stood uncomfortably, berating himself for a clumsy fool, in the far corner of the room beside the cabinet. He had no need to raise the sheet that covered it, to recapitulate the knickknacks it contained, the fans, miniatures, bonbonnières, and so forth, on which that day, to keep himself in countenance, he had fixed his eyes and which thereafter he had seen, year in, year out, always in the same places. Successive images of Jenny, changing with the years, overlaid themselves like tracings on the original picture of her hovering before his eyes. He saw her pass from childhood into girlhood, recalled her sudden changes of mood, her quickly restrained impulses, her shy half-confidences.

He was smiling as he turned to her. She may have guessed his thoughts, but she said nothing. She stood before him now as in the old days he used to see her in this same room—self-possessed, not shy yet never unconstrained, with the direct, rather hard gaze and calm, inscrutable expression he knew so well.

"Jenny, may I see your mother's room, too?"

She showed no surprise. "Come," she said.

That room, too, he knew down to its least detail; how well he remembered the photographs and portraits hanging on the walls, the big green damask bedspread glinting through the filmy point-lace coverlet! Daniel used to bring him here, after a discreet knock at his mother's door. Usually they found Mme. de Fontanin sitting at the fire in one or the other of the two easy-chairs that flanked the hearth, reading an English novel or some edifying work. She would lay the open book on her knees and welcome the two youngsters with beaming smiles, as if nothing could have given her greater pleasure than their visit. She would have Jacques sit in the chair facing hers and ask him about his life and studies, with a friendly, encouraging look on her face. If Daniel took it on himself to move back an ember slipping off the grate, she would snatch the tongs from his hand with playful alacrity and laughingly say: "No, my dear, let *me* attend to it. Fire is such a temperamental creature!"

It cost Jacques an effort to tear himself away from those long-cherished memories. At last, "Let's go," he said, turning to the door. Jenny followed him out into the hall. Suddenly he looked at her with such a grave expression that an unreasoning fear came over her, making her drop her eyes.

"Have you ever been happy here, really and *truly* happy?" he asked.

Deliberately, before replying, she reviewed the past, summed up in a flash of recollection those early years when she had been tormented by self-questionings, when, wise beyond her age, she had possessed herself in silence. In the greyness of her childhood there had been some saving gleams of light: her mother's love, Daniel's affection for her… . But, no, she had to admit it, truly happy she had never been.

Looking up, she shook her head. She saw Jacques draw a deep breath, impatiently dash back his wayward forelock, and suddenly smile. He said nothing; he dared not promise her happiness, but, still smiling, gazing deep into her eyes, he clasped her hands as he had done when he arrived, and pressed his lips to them. She kept her eyes fixed on him, and she felt her heart throbbing, throbbing….

It was not till much later that she became aware of how indelibly the picture of Jacques at the precise moment when he stood thus in the hall, bending above her hands, had stamped itself on her memory, with what hallucinating vividness she was, all her life long, to recall his forehead with the strand of dark hair drooping across it, the bold insistence of his wilful gaze, and that proud smile of his, radiant with promise.

# Chapter XIX

FILLING the courtyard with their provincial clangor, the bells of Saint Eustache's Church roused Jacques at an early hour. His first thought was for Jenny. Throughout the previous evening, up to the moment when he fell asleep, he had been running over in memory the incidents of his visit to the Fontanins' apartment; every time he recalled it some new detail came to mind. For a few minutes he lay still in bed, dimly taking stock of his new surroundings. The walls were stained with damp, the ceiling flaked and crumbling, a stranger's garments dangled from the coat-pegs. On top of the wardrobe were piles of propaganda leaflets and booklets. Above the metal basin hung a cheap mirror, splashed and stained. Jacques wondered idly what sort of life the comrade living here might be leading.

The window had stayed open all night; despite the early hour, the air that came in from the courtyard was foul and sweltering.

He took his pocket diary from the bedside table. Monday, the twenty-seventh. Let's see, now. Got to meet those fellows from the C.G.T. this morning at ten; then I must see about that legacy, call on the lawyer, broker. But at one I'll be at her place, with her! At four, the meeting that's been fixed up for Knipperdinck. At six I might drop in at *Le Libertaire*. And tonight there's that mass meeting. Shouldn't be surprised if there's a rough house. Last night, already, one felt there was trouble in the air. Still, we can't let those young patriots have it all their own way in the streets of Paris. Tonight's demonstration promises well; we have posters all over the place. The Building Section has called on the unions to turn out in force. That's all to the good; it's important for the trade-union movement to keep in close touch with the Party.

He ran out into the hallway, filled his jug at the tap, and sluiced his shoulders with cold water.

Suddenly, as the thought of Manuel Roy came back to him, he fell to objurgating the young medico. "The truth," he muttered, "is that the people you accuse of being unpatriotic are people in revolt against that damned capitalism you stand by. If anyone attacks the system, you say he's a disloyal Frenchman. '*La Patrie*,' that's your slogan," he gurgled, his face plunged in the basin. "But what you really mean is 'class,' the social hierarchy. All your blather about patriotism's simply eyewash; what you're defending is the present social system." Gripping the towel by both ends, he vigorously rubbed his back; his mind was full of visions of the coming world in which the various countries would survive as local, self-determining states under the federate control of a proletarian organization.

Then his mind harked back to the trade unions. "It's only when one's got a place inside the unions," he muttered, "that one can put in really useful work." His face darkened. Why was he in France? To pick up information—yes; and he did his best at it. Only yesterday hadn't he sent some brief reports to Geneva which would certainly be of help to Meynestrel? But he had no illusions about the importance of his mission. "If only I could make myself really useful—*act!*" he sighed. He had come to Paris with that hope, and was raging at being constrained to be a mere onlooker, a collector of unconsidered gossip; in short, he chafed at doing nothing, being unable to do anything.

Action of any concrete kind was obviously impossible on the international plane to which he was perforce restricted. It was ruled out for those who did not form part of any definite group, who were not members—what was more, members of long standing—of recognized associations. "That's the trouble," he murmured despondently, "with being a freelance as regards the revolution. An instinct of escape led me to break with the bourgeoisie. It was as an individual that I rebelled against them, not as the member of a class. I've always been self-centred, trying to 'find myself.' " Mithoerg's taunts came back to him. "You, *Kamerad*, will never be a true revolutionary." And, thinking of the Austrian, of Meynestrel, and of all those others whose stern sense of reality had led them to accept once for all the fact that revolution cannot dispense with bloodshed, he felt again the tightening at the throat which always gripped him when he came up against that ugly issue, the problem of violence. "Oh, if only one day I could free my mind of doubts, make an entire surrender of myself, heart and soul!"

He finished dressing in one of those moods of vague dejection which were only too familiar to him, but fortunately did not last, quickly succumbing to the stress and bustle of active life.

He gave himself a little shake. "Let's go and find out what's been happening."

The thought of it was enough to brace him. After locking his door, he ran down to the street. The papers had little new to tell him. The right-wing organs made much of the demonstrations of the League of Patriots around the Strasbourg monument. In most of the papers the scant official communiqués were supplemented with verbose, often contradictory comments. They conveyed an impression that orders had been given to alternate, as deftly as possible, grounds for hope and reasons for alarm. The leftwing press called on all pacifists to attend a monster demonstration to be held that evening at the Place de la République. *The Bataille Syndicaliste* flaunted a front-page appeal: "ALL OUT ON THE BOULEVARDS TONIGHT!"

Jacques called in at the *Humanité* office before going to the Rue de Bondy, where he was not due till ten.

At the door of Gallot's office he was buttonholed by an elderly woman, whom he remembered having met on several occasions at gatherings in the *Progrès* rooms. A militant Socialist of fifteen years' standing, she was editor of the journal *La Femme Libre*, and was generally known as "Old Mother Ury." Everybody liked her, but was careful to keep out of her clutches, for her loquacity knew no bounds. Obliging to a degree, an eager champion of all worthy causes and unsparing of herself, she had a mania for recommending people to each other, and, despite age and varicose veins, she was indefatigable when it was a question of getting a worker into a job or a comrade out of a tight corner. When Périnet had fallen foul of the police, she had courageously given him shelter. She was a quaint-looking creature; her wild, wispy grey hair gave her the air of one of the harpies of the Commune. Yet her face had kept a beauty of its own. "She's like a classy doll that's Been left out in the rain"—thus Périnet in his broad Parisian accent. She was a fervent vegetarian, and her latest enterprise was a cooperative society which was to provide each district of Paris with its Socialist-vegetarian restaurant. The crisis notwithstanding, she would not miss a chance of making a convert to the vegetarian creed and, clutching Jacques's arm, launched out into a homily.

"Ask the folks who know about it, my dear boy. Consult any health specialist. Your body can't achieve the harmony of its functions, and your brain can't give its maximum output, if you insist on stuffing yourself with decaying animal matter, if you live on corpses like a vulture!"

Jacques had great difficulty in shaking her off and getting into Gallot's office alone. Gallot was busy examining a list of names that Pagès, his secretary, was showing him, and ticking them off with a red pencil. He glanced up over the rampart of documents stacked on the table and signed to Jacques to take a seat, while he finished checking the list.

As Jacques saw him now, in profile, his head seemed a rodent's rather than a man's; almost all of his face consisted of a tapering snout extending from the slanting forehead to the tip of the nose. Its beginning was hidden in a mass of pepper-and-salt hair crowning his brows, and it ended in a bushy beard like a penwiper clamped to an abortive chin and fuzzing up round the small, sunken mouth. Jacques never set eyes on Gallot without a sense of startled curiosity, like that one feels when catching a hedgehog unawares upon some country road before it has had time to curl into a ball.

The door was flung violently open and Stefany burst in, coatless, shirtsleeves rolled to the elbows on his sinewy arms, his birdlike nose bespectacled. He brought a copy of the resolution passed the day before at the Trade Union Congress in Brussels.

Gallot stood up to greet him, but only after he had taken the list of names from Pagès and slipped it carefully into a file. The three men talked of the Belgian resolution for a while, paying no heed to Jacques. Then they began discussing the latest news.

That morning undoubtedly the tension had relaxed; the news from Central Europe furnished some grounds for hope. No Austrian troops had so far crossed the Danube. This sudden lull, coming as it did after Austria's seeming haste to force a break with Servia, was, to Jaurés's mind, significant. Obviously, in view of the conciliatory tone maintained by Servia and the undisguised indignation of the European powers, Austria was still of two minds about crossing her Rubicon. Moreover, all things considered, it seemed reasonable to put a less unfavourable interpretation on the threats of mobilization bandied by Germany and Russia which had caused such a flutter in the diplomatic dovecots. Some saw in these measures an ostensibly aggressive line of action pursued with the best intentions—to safeguard peace. And there was no denying that its immediate effects promised well: Russia had obtained from the Servians a promise to fall back without fighting in the event of an Austrian advance. Thus time would be gained for exploring possibilities of conciliation.

The reports Jaurés had received as to the antiwar activities of the internationalists were, on the whole, encouraging. In Italy the Socialist members of Parliament were to meet in Milan, review the situation, and affirm the pacifist position of the Italian Party. In Germany the measures taken by the government to muzzle the opposition, stringent though they were, had failed. A mass demonstration against war was due to take place in Berlin on the following day. In France the local Socialist and trade-union orglocanizations all over the country were on the alert and formulating plans for a strike.

A message was brought to Stefany that Jules Guesde was waiting to see him. Eager to be on time for his next appointment, Jacques left the room with him and accompanied him to his private office.

"*Local* organizations, you said." Jacques's tone was dubious. "In the event of war, would they be prepared to embark on a *general* strike, I wonder?"

"Obviously it would be a general strike," Stefany replied. But, to Jacques's thinking, his tone somewhat lacked confidence.

The Café du Rialto was in the Rue de Bondy, and its proximity to the trade-union headquarters, the Confédération Generale du Travail—familiarly known as the C.G.T.—had caused this café to be chosen as the meeting-place of a group of particularly active trade-unionists. Here Jacques was due to meet two C.G.T. militants with whom Richardley had asked him to get in touch. One of them had been a schoolmaster; the other, foreman in an ironworks.

Jacques was greatly interested by their description of the plans in process of being drawn up to bring about a closer collaboration between the activities of the C.G.T. and those of the Socialist organizations in their joint antiwar campaigns. The conversation had lasted nearly an hour—Jacques had no desire to cut it short—when the woman in charge of the establishment appeared at the door of the back room used for meetings and to the company at large announced: "Thibault's wanted at the telephone."

Jacques did not move at once. No one could have had a notion he was to be found here, and he supposed there was some other person of his name among those present. But, as no one else made a move, he went out to make sure.

At the other end of the wire was Pagès. It flashed on Jacques that, when leaving Gallot's office, he had mentioned his appointment at the Rialto.

"Lucky I got you," Pagès said. "There's a Swiss fellow here wants to see you. He's been looking for you since yesterday, he says."

"Who is he?"

"A funny little bird with white hair. Looks like an albino."

"I know who it is. He's not Swiss, he's a Belgian. I wonder what he's here for."

"I didn't want to give away where you were. But I told him to look in at the Croissant at one, on the off chance."

Jacques remembered his plan to visit Jenny.

"Nothing doing. I've an appointment at one, which I can't possibly

"Suit yourself," Pagès cut in. "But it seems urgent. He has a message from Meynestrel to transmit to you… . Well, anyhow, I've let you know. So long."

"Thanks."

An urgent message from Meynestrel! As he left the Rialto, Jacques was still undecided. He could not bring himself to delay his visit to Jenny. Finally good sense won the day. Before calling on his lawyer, he flung ragefully into a postoflice and sent a special-delivery letter to Jenny, telling her not to expect him before three.

Beynaud's offices occupied the whole first floor of a handsome building in the Rue Tronchet. In other circumstances, the heavy pomposity of the lawyer, the solemnity of the premises, furniture, and staff, and the archaic gloom of this necropolis of legal documents would have struck Jacques as frankly ludicrous. He was greeted with a certain deference, as son and heir of the late lamented M. Thibault and a potential client in the future. From office-boy to head of the establishment, veneration for the man of property was obviously *de rigueur*. Jacques was requested to sign certain documents and, as he seemed in a particular hurry to take possession of the fortune standing in his name, discreet inquiries were ventured as to his intentions.

"Obviously," Maître Beynaud oracled, gripping the lions' heads which ended the arms of his thronelike chair, "the Bourse, in critical times like these, offers unusual opportunities—for those who have inside knowledge of the stock-market. But we must not forget the risks involved… ."

Cutting short the oracle, Jacques took his leave.

At the broker's office the clerks were in a state of feverish commotion behind their cagelike railings. Telephones were frantically buzzing and orders were being called out from desk to desk. The Stock Exchange was due to open shortly and, in view of the political situation, there were fears of something like a panic. Difficulties were raised when Jacques asked to see the head of the firm, M. Jonquoy, in person, and he had to make shift with the great man's second-in-command. No sooner had he expressed a desire to sell out his complete holdings than he was informed that the moment was ill-chosen and he would sustain a heavy loss on the transaction.

"Never mind" was all he said.

So determined did he seem that the broker was impressed. To take so rash a step with such serene assurance undoubtedly implied that this odd young man had picked up some inside information and had in view a masterstroke of speculation. Two days, however, would be needed to put through the selling orders. Jacques rose, expressing his intention to return on Wednesday and receive in cash the proceeds of the sales.

The broker escorted him politely to the outer door.

Jacques found Vanheede sitting by himself near the entrance of the café. His elbows on the table, his chin cupped in his hands, he was blinking toward the door, watching all who entered. He cut a quaint figure in a khaki tropical suit, bleached almost to the paleness of his hair. Though at the Croissant they were used to queer birds of every plumage, he attracted some amused attention.

On seeing Jacques he stood up at once, and the blood rose to his pale cheeks. For a moment he could not get a word out. Then, "At last!" he breathed.

"So you're at Paris too, Vanheede old man!"

"At last!" the white-haired youth repeated shakily. "I was really getting terribly alarmed, Baulthy, you know."

"Why? What's up?"

Screening his eyes with his hand, Vanheede cast a weary glance toward the neighbouring tables. Greatly mystified, Jacques took the seat beside Vanheede's, bending his ear to him.

"You're wanted," the albino whispered.

A picture of Jenny rose before Jacques's eyes; impatiently he thrust back his wayward lock of hair and asked uncomfortably: "I'm wanted? In Geneva?"

Shaking his tousled head, Vanheede fumbled in his pocket. From his wallet he extracted a sealed, unaddressed envelope. While Jacques was feverishly opening it, Vanheede whispered in his ear: "I've something else for you. Identity papers in the name of Eberlé."

The envelope contained a double sheet of notepaper; on the front sheet were some lines in Richardley's hand. The second sheet seemed blank.

Jacques read:

> The Pilot is counting on you. Letter follows. We all meet at Brussels on Wednesday.
>
> Yours, R.

Jacques knew what "Letter follows" signified: that the blank page had a message written in invisible ink. He twiddled the letter between his fingers. "I'll have to go home to find out what is written there… . And suppose you hadn't found me?" he asked Vanheede.

A seraphic smile lit up the young face. "Mithoerg has come, too. In that case, he was to open the envelope and do the job himself. We're to meet the others at Brussels. … So you've moved from Liébaert's place?"

"Where is Mithoerg now?"

"He's hunting for you, too. We're putting up with a man called Oerding, one of Mithoerg's fellow-countrymen, and I'm to meet him there at three."

"Look here!" Jacques thrust the letter into his pocket. "I won't take you with me to my room; there's no point in letting the concierge set eyes on you. But will you and Mithoerg meet me at a quarter-past four, at the tramway shelter outside the Montparnasse station, you know? I'll take you to an interesting meeting in the Rue des Volontaires. And tonight, after dinner, we'll go to the demonstration in the Place de la République."

Half an hour later, in his room, Jacques read the secret message.

> Be in Berlin on Tuesday, the 28th.
> At 6 p.m. visit Aschinger's Café in Potsdamerplatz. Tr. will be there and give you detailed instructions.
> After taking what he gives you, catch first train to Brussels.
> Spare no precaution. Have no other papers on you except those given by V.
> If, by mischance, caught and accused of espionage, employ as lawyer Max Kerfen of Berlin.
> It's a plan devised by Tr. and group. Tr. particularly insisted on your cooperation.

"So that's that!" Jacques said half aloud, and thought immediately: "Well, here's my chance of *doing* something. I'm on active service—at last!"

The developer had left a smell of chemicals in the basin. After drying his hands, Jacques sat down on the bed.

"Now let's think things out quite calmly. Got to be in Berlin tomorrow afternoon. The morning train wouldn't get me there in time to be at Aschinger's at six. I must take the ten o'clock train tonight. Anyhow, I'll have time to see Jenny again. Thank goodness! But I'll miss the demonstration." His breath was coming rather rapidly. There was a timetable in his valise, which was lying open on the floor. Picking it up, he went to the window; suddenly he found the room insufferably hot. "After all, the twelve-fifteen train would do. It's a local train, but if I take it I'll be able to attend the demonstration."

In a room near by, a woman was singing as she worked; now and again the shrill, full-throated melody was interrupted by a metallic clink, the sound of flatirons put back on a stove.

" 'Tr.' means Trautenbach, of course. What's this great 'plan' of his, I wonder? And why did he insist on me?"

He mopped his sweating brow. He was at once thrilled by the prospect of doing something definite, by the mysterious nature of his mission and the risks it might involve, and heart-broken at the thought of having to leave Jenny.

"As I'm to meet them in Brussels on Wednesday," he reflected, "there's nothing to prevent my being back in Paris on Thursday, if all goes well."

In that case he would be away only three days—a consoling thought.

"I must let jenny know at once. There's just time, if I'm to be outside the Gare Montparnasse at four-fifteen."

As he could not count on being able to return to his room before leaving Paris, he emptied out his wallet, made a packet of his private papers, and addressed it, on the off chance, to Meynestrel. He kept with him only the Eberlé passport given him by Vanheede.

Then he started off post-haste to Jenny's apartment.

# Chapter XX

JENNY opened the door so promptly when he rang the bell that one might have thought she had been standing there ever since he had left her, waiting for his return.

"Bad news," he said at once in a low voice. "I've got to go abroad and I must leave Paris this evening."

"Go abroad?" she faltered. Her face had gone pale; her eyes were fixed on him intently. He looked so upset at having to inflict this disagreeable news on her that she would have given much to be able to hide her distress. But the thought of losing Jacques again played havoc with her self-control.

"I'll be back on Thursday, or Friday at the latest," he hastened to explain.

Her head was bowed. She drew a deep breath. Slowly the colour came back to her cheeks.

"Only three days," he said with an attempt at a smile. "Three days isn't such a long time, when one has a whole life of happiness ahead!"

She gave him a shy, questioning glance.

"Please don't ask me about it," he said. "I've been assigned a special mission. I *must* go."

At the word "mission" an expression of such deep anxiety had settled on Jenny's face that Jacques, though himself unaware on what errand he was being sent to Germany, felt he must say something to reassure her. "It's only a matter of getting in touch with some foreign politicians, and I've been given the job because I speak their language fluently."

Her eyes were still intent on him. He broke off abruptly, pointing to some newspapers lying on the hall table. "I suppose you've seen the news?" he asked.

"Yes" was all she said, but the tone made it clear that she was now as conscious as he was himself of the gravity of the political situation.

He came closer, clasped both her hands in his and kissed them. "Let's go in there, to 'our' room," he suggested, pointing to Daniel's bedroom. "I've only a few minutes to spare. Don't let's spoil them."

Brightening up a little, she led the way along the passage.

"Any news from your mother?"

"Not yet," she said without turning. "She was to have reached Vienna early this afternoon. I don't expect a wire before tomorrow."

The room had obviously been made ready for his visit. The partly lowered blind mellowed the light, the whole place had been tidied up, newly ironed window-curtains had been hung, the clock set going, and a bowl of sweet-peas stood on one corner of the desk.

Jenny had come to a halt in the middle of the room and was watching his face with a tense, rather anxious gaze. He smiled, but could not get her to smile in return.

"So you really mean it?" she said slowly, in an unsteady voice. "You can stay only a few minutes?"

His eyes lingered on her smilingly, affectionately, but there was something vaguely remote in his gaze, for all its steadfastness, that made Jenny slightly uneasy. It struck her that not once, since he came in, had Jacques met her eyes quite squarely.

He saw her lips quiver. Clasping her hands again, he whispered: "Please don't make it too hard."

She drew herself up and smiled at him.

"That's better." He drew her toward a chair. Then, without explaining the sequence of his thoughts, he added in an undertone: "One's got to believe in oneself; in fact, one should have faith in nothing else. A man's inner life can have no solid foundation unless he's fully alive to his destiny and sacrifices everything to it."

"Yes," she murmured in an unsteady voice.

"To realize one's inner forces," he went on, as if talking to himself, "and let them take charge. And if others choose to look on them as evil forces, well, it can't be helped."

"Yes," she repeated, looking down again.

Time and again, during the past few days, she had thought, as she was thinking then: "Now that's something I must store up in my mind and think over, so as to understand him better."

She remained quite motionless for a minute, her eyes veiled by their lashes; there was a look of such rapt meditation in the bent face that for a while Jacques could not bring himself to speak again. At last in a vibrant but controlled voice he said: "One of the turning-points in my life was when I realized that what others disapproved of in me and thought pernicious was, on the contrary, the best and most genuine part of my nature."

She listened to him, grasped his meaning, but a sort of dizziness came over her. For the past two days the foundations of her inner world had been crumbling. A void was forming about her which the new values on which all Jacques's pronouncements seemed based were as yet unable to replenish.

But then she saw his face light up. He was smiling again, but his smile was quite different. He had just thought of something, and gave her a questioning look.

"I've an idea, Jenny. As you're all by yourself this evening, why shouldn't we go and have dinner together, you and I? Anywhere you like."

She stared at him without a word of reply, taken aback by so simple, yet in her case so unusual, a suggestion.

"I shan't be free before half-past seven," he went on. "And I have an appointment at nine in the Place de la République. Shall we spend that hour or so together?"

"Yes."

What a way she has, Jacques thought, so resolute yet gentle a way of saying "Yes" or "No"!

"Splendid!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I shan't have time to call for you, but could you manage to be in front of the Bourse at half-past seven?"

She nodded.

He stood up. “Well, now I must be off. See you this evening, then.”

She made no attempt to detain him, but followed him silently to the head of the stairs.

As, on his way down, he turned back for a last affectionate smile, she leaned over the banisters and, suddenly emboldened, called to him in a low tone: “I like to picture you moving about among your friends. In Geneva, for instance. It’s there, I should say, you’re really and truly yourself.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, you see,” she replied slowly, groping for her words, “wherever *I’ve* seen you, until now, you’ve always seemed to be rather—how shall I put it?—rather out of your element.”

He had stopped half-way down the staircase and stood looking up at her earnestly. “Don’t you believe it!” he exclaimed. “Over there, too, I’m out of my element. In fact, I’m out of my element everywhere. I’ve always been like that. I was born out of my element!” He smiled. “It’s only when I’m with you, Jenny, that this feeling of being out of my element wears off a bit.”

His smile faded. He seemed half inclined to add something else. He made a hasty gesture which might have meant anything and went on down the stairs.

“She’s perfection itself,” he was thinking. “Perfection itself—yet how terribly mysterious!” But that was nothing against her, to his mind. Was not the appeal Jenny had had for him from the first partly due to that sphinxlike quality of hers?

Back in her room, Jenny stood for a few moments behind the closed door listening to his receding footsteps.

“How baffling he is!” she thought suddenly. Not that she would have had him any different. Her love for him was deep enough to vanquish even that eerie sense of dread he always left in his wake.

# Chapter XXI

THE Vaugirard meeting was held in the private room of the Café Garibaldi, in the Rue des Volontaires.

Being introduced by Jacques, Vanheede and Mithoerg were received as delegates of the Swiss branch of the Party and were given seats in the front rows.

Giboin, the chairman, called upon Knipperdinck to address the meeting. The works of the old Swedish thinker were written in his native tongue, but his influence had long since taken effect beyond the confines of the Scandinavian countries. His more outstanding books had been translated, and many of those present had read them. He spoke French well. His tall stature, his crown of snow-white hair, the light of apostolic fervour shining in his eyes all enhanced the prestige of his theories. He hailed from a peace-loving and essentially neutral land, in which the rabid nationalism of the leading Continental countries had for many years been viewed with anxiety and disapproval. His appraisal of the European situation was severely lucid, and his well-informed, impassioned speech was constantly interrupted by bursts of applause.

Jacques listened with half an ear. His mind was full of Jenny—and of Berlin. As soon as Knipperdinck had wound up with an emotional appeal to make a stand against militarism, Jacques rose from his seat without waiting for the general debate to begin and, giving up the idea of taking Vanheede and Mithoerg round to the *Libertaire*, made an appointment to meet them after dinner at the mass meeting.

In the square beside the Comedie Franfaise, seeing what the time was, he changed his plans. Montmartre was a long way off. It would be better to give up the call at the *Libertaire*, to go back to the *Humanité*, and get some idea of what had been happening during the afternoon.

As he turned into the Rue du Croissant, he ran up against old Mourlan, in his black printer's overalls, just leaving the premises of the newspaper in company with Milanov. He walked a little way with them.

Jacques knew that Milanov kept in touch with anarchist circles. He asked him if he meant to attend the Congress to be held in London during the weekend.

"Nothing that's of any use can come of that" was all the Russian chose to answer.

"And besides," Mourlan put in, "the Congress seems to be in a bad way. No one cares to be in the limelight just now. They're all running for cover. At police headquarters and in the Home Office, they're already spreading their nets; they're making haste to bring the B List up to date."

"What's that—the B List?" Milanov inquired.

"A list of all the suspects in the country. They have to see the police force set for action if the crash comes."

"And what are they saying up there this evening?" Jacques asked, pointing to the *Humanité* windows.

Mourlan shrugged his shoulders. The latest information to come over the wires was anything but hopeful. From St. Petersburg, thanks to the indiscretion of an always well-informed special correspondent of the *Times* of London, the news had leaked out that the Tsar had authorized the mobilization of the fourteen army corps stationed on the Austrian border, thus taking up Germany's challenge. Not only had Russia not been intimidated, as it had been hoped at first she would be, but she was becoming blatantly aggressive. The Russian government threatened at once to decree a general mobilization of all her forces, should Germany so much as venture upon partial mobilization. It was known through dispatches received from Berlin that the Kaiser's government, throwing caution to the winds, was speeding up mobilization. The Chief of Staff, von Moltke, had been urgently summoned to headquarters. The German public had been informed by the official press that war was expected to break out at any moment. The *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* published a lengthy plea in favour of the Austrian ultimatum and declared that Servia must be completely crushed. From early morning, in Berlin, the banks had been besieged by panicky mobs, clamouring to withdraw their deposits.

In France, the credit establishments were similarly mobbed. In Lyon, Bordeaux, and Lille, runs on the banks were making matters difficult for the directors. On the Paris Bourse there had been an actual riot that very afternoon. An Austrian broker, charged with having engineered a fall in the Rentes, had been manhandled by an angry crowd shouting: "Kill the spy!" The police had managed to rescue him in the nick of time. An inspector had ordered the peristyle to be cleared, and it had been as much as the police could do to prevent the Austrian from being torn to pieces by a raging mob. The incident was an absurd one in itself, but it went to show to what a pitch of war-fever the public was worked up.

"And what about the Balkans?" Jacques asked. "The Austrians haven't actually moved across the border, have they?"

"Not yet, it appears."

According to the latest telegrams, however, the offensive which had been postponed so far was expected to be launched that night. Gallot, in fact, declared on reliable authority that Austria had decided upon general mobilization, that the decree would be published next morning and carried out within three days.

"In France," Mourlan remarked, "all officers on leave, men on furlough, railway and postoffice employees away on their holidays, have just been called back by wire. Poincaré himself is setting the example. He's hurrying straight back, without interrupting his trip anywhere. He's due at Dunkirk on Wednesday."

"Your mention of Poincaré," Milanov broke in, "reminds me …" and he went on to relate a significant anecdote which was going the rounds in Vienna. On July 21—the story went—at the reception of the diplomatic corps in the Winter Palace, the President of the French Republic, in that peremptory voice of his, had addressed the Austrian Ambassador in the following sensational terms: "Servia has very warm friends in the Russian people, Mr. Ambassador. And Russia has an ally—France!"

"Always the same policy of sabre-rattling!" Jacques muttered, his thoughts reverting to Studler.

Milanov suggested an adjournment to the *Progrès* offices, pending the hour set for the meeting. But Mourlan turned down the suggestion. "We've had quite enough palaver for one evening," he observed gruffly.

"There's something I want you to do for me," Jacques said to him when Milanov had gone. "I've left a parcel tied up with string in my room in the Rue du Four; it contains some private papers. If anything … goes wrong with me during the next few days, will you

have them sent to Meynestrel in Geneva?"

He smiled, but gave no further explanations. Mourlan looked him in the eyes for a moment or two. But he asked no question, merely nodding assent. As they parted, he held Jacques's hand for a moment in his own. "Well, good luck!" he said, for once omitting to call him "lad."

Jacques went back to the newspaper office. He had only half an hour left before the time of his appointment with Jenny.

A party of Socialists, among whom he caught sight of Cadieux, Compere-Morel, Vaillant, and Sembat, was coming out of Jaurés's room. He saw them go into Gallot's office. Turning back, he went and knocked at Stefany's door. Stefany was by himself, bending over a table strewn with foreign newspapers.

He was a tall, thin man, hollow-chested and high-shouldered. His long face, framed in coal-black hair, was perpetually twitching, sometimes so violently that he was taken for a lunatic at large. He was a man of all-consuming, typically Southern activity. (He hailed from Avignon.) After obtaining a degree in history, he had taught that subject for some years in a provincial public school before diverting his energies to the Socialist cause, and had left a lasting impression on the memories of his pupils. Jules Guesde had him given a post on the *Humanité* staff. Jaurés, whose robust health inclined him to shun sickly people, had no liking for the historian, though he held him in high esteem. He had, however, let him work his way up to a leading position on the staff, and turned over the harder jobs to him.

He had deputed him this afternoon to keep in touch with the Parliamentary Socialist Group and the executive committee of the Party. Jaurés was trying to get the Socialist deputies to enter an official protest against any armed intervention on the part of Russia. He had been calling again and again at the Quai d'Orsay in the hope of inducing Paris not to side with St. Petersburg and to preserve complete liberty of action, so as to be able to play the part of arbitrator and peacemaker when opportunity arose.

Stefany had just had a long talk with the Skipper. He did not conceal from Jacques that he had found him in an unusually "jumpy" state. Jaurés had decreed that the next day's number of the *Humanité* should bear this ominous headline in block letters: WAR WILL BREAK OUT THIS MORNING.

Between them, he and Stefany had drafted a manifesto in which the Socialist Party proclaimed its will to peace *urbi et orbi*, as spokesman of the French working-class. Of this declaration Stefany had committed to memory whole passages, which he recited in his singsong voice, while pacing up and down the narrow office. His small, birdlike eyes flickered excitedly behind his glasses, and his lean, hooked nose stabbed the air like an eagle's beak.

"Against a policy of violence," he declaimed, raising a monitory arm, "the Socialists appeal to the whole country." The need he felt, on this particular evening, of bracing up his faith by dwelling on these comforting assurances was at once obvious and pathetic.

A similar declaration had been received in the course of the day from the German Socialists. Jaurés had himself translated it, with Stefany's assistance. "War is threatening us," it ran. "We will not have war, at any price. Long live international reconciliation! In the name of humanity and civilization the class-conscious proletariat of Germany enters an impassioned protest. With no uncertain voice it calls on the German government to use its influence over Austria for the maintenance of peace. And if this abominable war cannot be averted, it demands that Germany be kept entirely out of the conflict."

Jaurés wanted the two manifestos to be reproduced by thousands and displayed side by side, in two-column posters, all over Paris and in all the large cities. The various Socialist printing-works had been commandeered that same night for the purpose.

"In Italy they're doing some good work, too," Stefany observed. "The Socialist group of deputies have held a meeting in Milan, at which they passed a resolution demanding that an emergency session of the Italian Chamber be convened immediately, so as to force the government to declare publicly that Italy has no intention of following the lead of her partners in the Triple Alliance."

With a quick movement, he snatched a sheet of paper from the table. "Here's a translation of the Socialist manifesto that has just been published in Mussolini's *Avanti*: 'There's only one line for Italy to take—neutrality. Is the Italian proletariat going to allow itself to be led a second time to the slaughter? For us, for all of us, the slogan today is: Down with war! Not a man, not a centesimo will we contribute!' "

This translation was to be published next day on the front page of the *Humanité*.

"On Wednesday," he continued, "in Brussels, will be held not only a session of the International Socialist Committee, but also in the evening, a mass protest meeting, with speeches by Jaurés, by Vandervelde for Belgium, Haase and Molkenbuhr for Germany, Keir Hardie for England, and Rubanovitch for Russia. It will be a spectacular affair. In every country all available militants will be called upon to make the trip and join in a demonstration that will stagger Europe. It must be made clear that the proletariat of every country in the world is up in arms against the nationalistic governments."

He strode up and down the room, puckering his nose, screwing up his lips, seething with impotent rage, and steadfastly refusing to abandon hope.

The door opened to admit Marc Levoir. He was red in the face, excited. No sooner had he come in than he dropped into a seat. "It's enough to make a man wonder if they don't actually want it, every one of them!"

"What? War?"

He had just got back from the Quai d'Orsay and was the bearer of strange news. Von Schoen, it was stated, had come round to give notice that, to provide Russia with a decent excuse for dropping her uncompromising attitude, Germany undertook to obtain from Austria a formal promise that the territorial integrity of Servia would be respected. Furthermore, the Ambassador was reported to have suggested to the French government that it should publish an official statement in the press declaring that France and Germany, "completely at one in their fervent desire that peace should be maintained," were acting in concert and doing their utmost to persuade Russia to act with moderation. And it was alleged that the French government, under the influence of Berthelot, had rejected this proposal and declined point-blank to make any show whatever of being "at one" with Germany, for fear of giving offence to its Russian ally.

"Whenever Germany makes any suggestion whatsoever," Levoir concluded, "the Quai d'Orsay, like one man, pronounces it 'a trap.' And so it has always been for the past forty years."

Stefany's beady eyes were fixed on Levoir with an expression of distress. His sallow face seemed to have grown still longer, as though his flabby cheeks were being dragged down by the heavy under-jaw. "What's so appalling," he muttered, "is to think there are six or seven men in Europe—ten, perhaps—making history all on their own. It puts me in mind of that line in King Lear: ' 'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind! …' Come on"—he broke o suddenly, placing his hand on Levoir's shoulder—"we must go and tell the Skipper about it."

When the others had left, Jacques rose from his seat. The time had come for him to keep his appointment with Jenny. "And tomorrow night," he thought, "I'll be in Berlin." He remembered his mission only at odd moments, but each time it was with a pleasurable thrill, not unmixed with a certain anxiety, anxiety lest he should fall short of what was expected of him.

# Chapter XXII

THOUGH it was barely the half-hour by the Bourse clock, Jenny was there already. Jacques saw her when he was some way off, and halted. The iron gates had been closed for the night and against the dim background Jenny's graceful form stood out in statuelike repose amid the usual evening crowd of newspaper-venders and busmen gathering at the Bourse terminal. For some moments he remained on the curb gazing at her, stirred by an emotion he had often felt in the past on taking her thus unawares. In the far-off days of Maisons-Laffite, he would often linger outside the Fontanins' garden on the chance of a glimpse of her. He remembered one late afternoon when he had seen her in a white dress emerging from the shadow of the fir trees and crossing a patch of sunlight that for a magic instant haloed her in dazzling sheen.

That night she was not wearing her mourning veil. The black costume made her seem even slimmer. She never yielded to the impulse to make herself attractive either in her dress or in her demeanour, for she sought her own approval only; she was at once too proud to care much what others thought and too modest to suppose others would trouble to pass judgment on her. The dresses she preferred were of a reserved cut, severely practical. None the less, Jenny always looked well dressed, with an austere, almost puritanical elegance due to simplicity and her natural good taste.

When she saw him coming, she gave a slight start and went toward him, smiling. For now she had learned to smile effortlessly—or, rather, a faint flutter dimpled the corners of her lips, while the clear depths of her eyes lit up with a sudden little sparkle that filled Jacques with delight each time that he glimpsed it.

"When you smile," he began teasingly, "you always look as if you were doing one a charity."

"Really?" She could not help feeling a little hurt by the remark, but at once she told herself that he was right, and almost went so far as to confess: "Yes, I know there's something dreadfully stiff and crabbed in my expression… ." But she always disliked talking about herself.

Suddenly Jacques gave a sigh. "Things are getting worse and worse. Every government's 'taking a firm stand,' blustering. It's a sort of competition to see who can be most intractable."

She had noticed how tired and careworn Jacques was looking, from the moment they had met. Now she threw him a questioning glance, as if eager to learn the details.

He shook his head obstinately. "No, no. Let's not talk about it. What would be the good, anyhow? I'd much rather you helped me to forget about it all, now that I've a short spell off. How about dining somewhere near by? That will save time, and I'm fiendishly hungry—didn't have any lunch. Come on!"

He led the way and she followed, thinking: "Supposing Mother or Daniel saw us now!" This escapade had suddenly given their intimacy—of which neither was as yet fully conscious—a sort of public recognition, and she had a vaguely guilty feeling, like a child who is doing wrong.

"How about that place?" He pointed to a humble little restaurant at the corner of a street; through the windows standing open on the street could be seen some tables spread with white tablecloths. "It looks quiet, don't you think so?"

Crossing the road, they entered the little dining-room side by side; it was cool and empty. In the background, through the glazed door of the kitchen, they had the back view of two women seated at table under a hanging lamp. Neither of them looked round.

With a weary gesture Jacques had dropped his hat onto the wall-sofa, and walked toward the kitchen door, hoping to attract the attention of the women. For a moment he stood unmoving. Jenny glanced at him and suddenly she fancied she was looking at the face of a stranger, a much older man; in the light issuing from the kitchen all the outlines of the face seemed evilly distorted. She had the impression of living in a nightmare, the panic fear of a young girl who has been lured by criminals to some sinister retreat. The sensation passed immediately; no sooner had Jacques turned to her and the shadows veered than he looked himself again.

"Do sit down," he said, moving the table aside for her to take a seat against the wall. "No, this is the best place; you won't have the light in your eyes."

It was a new experience for Jenny to find herself the object of a man's concern; she welcomed it now with a little thrill of pleasure.

The younger of the women in the kitchen, a fat, slatternly creature in a pink blouse, with a forehead like a heifer's and a mop of dark hair set low on it, had risen at last. She approached them with the surly air of an animal disturbed at feeding-time.

"Well, can we have some dinner, Mademoiselle?" Jacques asked in a genial tone.

The girl stared at him sulkily. "That depends."

Jacques's eyes roved merrily from the girl's face to Jenny's.

"You've got some eggs on hand, haven't you? Yes? And some cold meat, perhaps?"

The girl extracted a slip of paper from inside her blouse. "This is what we have." Her tone implied: "Take it or leave it."

But Jacques's good humour seemed imperturbable. "Splendid!" he exclaimed after reading out the menu and casting an inquiring glance at Jenny.

The waitress turned on her heel without a word.

"Nice disposition, hasn't she?" Jacques said with a chuckle and, laughing still, dropped into the seat facing Jenny. He rose again immediately to help her take off her coat.

She wondered whether to take off her hat as well. "Better not; my hair'll be dreadfully untidy." At once she felt ashamed of the coquetry behind the thought. Deliberately she took off her hat and purposely refrained from settling her hair after she had done so.

The sulky waitress came back with a steaming soup-tureen.

"Bravo, Mademoiselle!" cried Jacques, taking the soup-ladle she handed him. "We hadn't counted on this soup—it smells delicious!" Turning to Jenny, he said: "Let me help you."

His high spirits were a little forced; the truth was that this first meal together disconcerted him almost as much as it did Jenny. Moreover, he could not wholly rid his mind of the anxieties that had been haunting it all day.

A tarnished mirror behind Jenny doubled all her movements, enabling Jacques to see beyond the living presence her reflected self, the graceful play of neck and shoulders. Conscious that he was watching her, she suddenly said: "Jacques, I wonder—do you really, really know what I am like? It's dreadful, but I can't help wondering if you haven't a lot of … illusions about me.'"

She hid with a smile the very real misgivings that came on her whenever she asked herself: "Shall I ever manage to become as he would have me be? Am I not doomed to disappoint him?"

He smiled too. "And if I were to ask you: 'Do you really know the man I am?' what would you reply?"

After a moment's hesitation she said: "I think I'd have to answer 'No.' "

"But at the same time you'd think: 'That hasn't much importance.' … And you'd be right."

She assented with a slight nod. "Yes," she thought, "it hasn't much importance. All that will come in good time. What I thought just now is the sort of idea that haunts the minds of parents."

"We must have confidence in ourselves," Jacques said emphatically.

She made no reply, and he felt a vague alarm fretting his heart. But then her face lit up with a look of radiant happiness that, better than words, swept all his doubts away.

A smell of fried butter began to pervade the room.

"The Holy Terror's coming back," Jacques whispered.

The girl in the pink blouse put a sizzling omelet down on the table.

"A savoury omelet with minced bacon in it!" Jacques exclaimed. "Couldn't be better! Is it you who do the cooking, Mademoiselle?"

"Well, if you must know, I do."

"Congratulations!"

The girl condescended to smile, and simpered: "Oh, the dinners here ain't nothing much. You oughta come here for lunch. Not a seat to be had. But of an evening we don't have many customers. Only loving couples."

Jacques exchanged a merry glance with Jenny. He seemed genuinely relieved at having coaxed a smile from the ungracious wench.

"Now this," he said, smacking his lips appropriately, "is something like an omelet!"

Flattered, the waitress gave a chuckle and bent toward him as if to impart a secret. "Me, I do my own job in my own way, for them as knows a good thing when they eat it."

Thrusting her fists in the pockets of her apron, she ambled off.

"Are we to take that for a tactful compliment?" Jacques laughed.

Jenny was in a brown study. The little scene had been trivial enough, but it had taught her several surprising things. Obviously Jacques had a gift of creating, with a word or two, with a smile, by dint of the interest he showed in others, a sort of temperamental warmth around him, an atmosphere congenial to expansiveness and good feeling. None knew this better than Jenny; in his company even the most secretive, not to say churlish, characters sooner or later broke the taboo of silence, unbent, and spoke their hearts out. To her such a gift seemed positively astounding, for unlike Jacques, unlike Daniel too, she felt hardly any curiosity about others. She lived shut up in her private world, and so intent was she on keeping it inviolate that she took pains to rebuff all who approached her and offered to outside contacts, as it were, a smooth, defensive shell on which nothing could take effect. Thinking of her brother, she was moved to wonder: "Mayn't this curiosity which urges Jacques to interest himself in anyone who comes his way have as its complement an inability to discriminate, to pick and choose?"

"Are you capable of having preferences?" she asked abruptly. "Can you feel more attached to one person than to all others—and for always?"

At once she grew conscious of how clumsily she had put the question, and a blush rose to her cheek.

Jacques gazed at her, puzzled, trying to fathom the association of ideas behind it, as he repeated the question to himself, anxious above all to give it a straightforward answer. For both of them had an almost superstitious dread of deceiving each other on even the most trifling matter; it would be an act of sacrilege toward their love.

He was on the brink of saying: " 'Capable of having preferences'? How about my friendship with Daniel?" But that example would have been misleading, for he knew that time had impaired their friendship.

"So far—possibly not," he admitted rather grudgingly, and added almost harshly: "But surely that's no reason for doubting me!"

"I don't doubt you," she answered hastily, in a shaky voice.

He was struck by her woebegone air and recognized too late that her extreme sensitiveness called for the utmost prudence on his part. As he was pondering what to say, the waitress appeared with the next course, and he confined himself to a tenderly affectionate look that was an obvious plea to be forgiven for his tactlessness.

Her eyes were fixed on him. The rapidity with which Jacques's moods swung from one extreme to another dismayed her as a possible danger, but ravished her as well—though why it should do so was beyond her telling. Perhaps she saw in it the indication of an exceptionally strong personality, an untamed force. With a curious thrill of pride she smiled to herself: "My caveman!" The gloom had lifted from her face, and once more she felt possessed by the deep certitude of happiness that for the last two days had been pervading—and remoulding—her whole existence.

No sooner had the waitress gone than Jacques exclaimed: "How frail it is as yet, your confidence in me!"

In his tone there was not an atom of reproach; only regret, and something of remorse, for he could not forget that his behaviour in the past fully entitled Jenny to mistrust him.

She guessed at once what was passing in his mind and made haste to dissipate, as best as she could, those bitter memories. "The trouble is," she said, "that I'm so badly prepared for trusting anybody. I can't remember ever having"—she groped for the word, and one of Jacques's expressions came to her lips—"having experienced peace of mind, even as a child. That's how I am," she smiled. "Or, rather, that's how I used to be." In a low voice, her eyes bent on the tablecloth, she added: "I've never told that to anyone before." Impulsively, after a glance toward the kitchen door, she stretched her arms out to Jacques across the table; he noted that the delicately moulded hands were trembling.

She felt unutterably his, yet her one desire was to be his even more, to lose herself beyond recall in him.

"I was like you," he whispered; "alone, always alone, and never, never at peace."

"I've been through that too." Gently she withdrew her hands.

"Sometimes I'd fancy myself superior to the common run, and fuddle myself with pride. And at other times I'd tell myself I was ugly, ignorant, a hopeless dunce—and wallow in humility!"

"I was just the same."

"Always, everywhere out of place."

"So was I."

"The slave of my temperament."

"So was I. And with no hope of breaking away from it, of getting to be like other people."

"And if in some black moments I didn't utterly despair of myself," he exclaimed in a sudden burst of gratitude, "do you know to whom I owed it?"

For an instant she had a wild hope that he would say: "To you!" But Jacques went on: "It was to Daniel I owed it. Our friendship was founded on mutual trust. It was Daniel's affection and his trust that saved me."

"It saved me too," she said in a low voice. "Daniel was my only friend."

It seemed that they could never have enough of explaining themselves each to each—each through the other's lips; they gazed spellbound at one another with rapturous, insatiable eyes, eagerly watching for the other to smile a benison, a joyful affirmation of their perfect mutual understanding. It was like a glorious miracle, this intuitive, effortless interplay of mind on mind, the discovery that they were so amazingly alike. And it seemed to them that their store of confidences was inexhaustible and nothing in the world just now had more importance than this reciprocal discovery of each other's secrets.

"Yes, I owe it to Daniel that I didn't go hopelessly under. And of course to Antoine too," he added as an afterthought.

A look of coldness she could not disguise settled on Jenny's face. He observed the change at once and, perturbed by it, threw her a questioning glance. As no answer came, he asked point-blank: "Do you know my brother at all well?" He was ready to launch out into an enthusiastic eulogy of Antoine.

She all but frankly said: "I loathe him!" but thought better of it. "I don't like his eyes."

"What about his eyes?"

She wondered how to explain herself without wounding Jacques. Still, she was determined to keep nothing back from him, painful though it might be.

Greatly mystified, Jacques asked again: "What have you got against his eyes?"

She pondered for a while. "They give an impression of not knowing … of having ceased to know the difference between right and wrong."

A curious comment, and it left Jacques puzzled. But just then a remark Daniel had made to him one day, speaking of Antoine, crossed his mind. "Do you know what attracts me about your brother? It's his open-mindedness." What Daniel admired in Antoine was his capacity for appraising any problem on its own merits, as if he were examining an anatomical specimen, quite apart from any ethical preconceptions. It was a mental outlook that inevitably appealed to the descendant of a long line of Huguenots.

Jacques looked as if he wanted to hear more from her, but she met his gaze with eyes so calm and secret that he dared not question her further. "Inviolable!" he thought.

The waitress had come up again to change the plates. "Some cheese? Dessert? Two nice strong cups of coffee?"

"Nothing more for me, thanks," Jenny said.

"One coffee, please."

They waited for the girl to bring it before resuming freely their conversation. Jacques, who was watching Jenny furtively, was struck once again by the contrast between her eyes and her face; the expression of the eyes was so much older than her features, which had the tender immaturity of a young child's.

"Let me have another look at your eyes," he said, leaning across the table with a smile to make amends for the inquisition. "I'd like to *learn* them, to really know them. They're so marvellously limpid, ice-blue, crystal-clear. And the pupils keep changing all the time. Please don't move! It's fascinating."

She too gazed at him, but unsmiling, a little wearily.

"Do you know," he went on, "whenever you stare hard at something the iris contracts, and the pupil dwindles away till it's like a tiny round hole punched in the blue surface. And what tremendous willpower there is in your eyes!"

It flashed on him that Jenny might prove an invaluable helper in his life's work. And suddenly all his anxieties surged back into his mind; instinctively he glanced up at the wall-clock beside him.

Seeing a frown settle on his brows, Jenny felt suddenly afraid. "What are you thinking about, Jacques?" she whispered nervously.

He thrust back his forelock with an angry movement; unwittingly he had clenched his fists. "I'm thinking that at this moment there are in Europe perhaps a hundred men who foresee what's coming, who are straining every nerve to save their fellows from disaster—and they can't succeed in making themselves heard by the men they want to save. Can you imagine anything more grotesquely tragic! Will they manage to rouse the masses from their apathy? And will the masses …?"

He went on speaking and Jenny seemed to listen, but her thoughts were far away. From the moment of seeing Jacques glance up at the clock, her attention had begun to wander and she had been unable to still the tumult of her heart. Three whole days without him! Mastering the onset of panic which at all costs she was determined to conceal, she gave herself up so hungrily to the sad delight of feeling him beside her, if for just these few brief minutes more, that all she could do was to watch each fleeting change of his expression, each flutter of his brows, each sudden gleam that kindled in his eyes. And, watching, she did not try to follow what he said, but let her mind grow blurred under the rush of words and theories that seemed crepitating round her like flurries of bright sparks.

Suddenly Jacques stopped short. "You're not listening!"

Her lashes quivered; she flushed. "Sorry …!" Impulsively, like a child asking to be forgiven, she held out her hand. He clasped it, turned it over, and pressed his lips to her palm. Suddenly he felt a tremor ripple down the slender arm and recognized with a strange thrill such as he had never known before that the little hand, not merely yielding passively, was pressing itself fondly to his lips.

But time was passing, and there was something he had still to tell her. “Jenny, there’s something I absolutely must let you know—tonight. Last year, after my father’s death, I refused to hear anything about—about my share of the estate. I didn’t want to touch a sou of that money. Well, yesterday I changed my mind.”

He paused. Startled by his words, she had shrunk back a little, lowering her eyes; despite herself, all sorts of confused, contradictory fancies were racing through her head.

“I intend to take delivery of the money and turn it over to the International Party Fund, to be used for the antiwar campaign.”

She drew a deep breath; the colour came back to her cheeks. Why, she wondered, was he telling her about it?

“You approve of this intention, don’t you?”

Instinctively Jenny shunned his eyes. What thought was at the back of his head that made him emphasize as he had done that word “approve”? It almost looked as if he were granting her the right to control his conduct. She gave an almost imperceptible nod and looked up timidly. He was careful to maintain an interrogative expression.

“So far,” he went on, “I’ve always managed to earn my living, writing articles. The absolute minimum, I admit—but that doesn’t matter. The people among whom I live are all quite poor; I’m like them, and that’s as it should be.”

He drew a deep breath. When he spoke again, a feeling of embarrassment made his voice sound almost gruff. “If you, Jenny, can put up with this … this humble existence, I haven’t any fears about our future.”

She bowed her head. It was the first time he had broached the subject of their future, their life in common, and the rapturous vision opening up before her made her inarticulate.

He waited for her to raise her head; then, when he saw the radiant ecstasy transfiguring her face, he murmured: “Thank you.”

The waitress brought the bill. After paying it, he looked up again at the clock. “Nearly twenty to. I haven’t even time enough to see you home.”

Jenny had risen without waiting for a sign from him. Suddenly she remembered with a sinking heart: “He’s going away. Where will he be tomorrow …? Three days to wait! Three intolerable days!”

As he was helping her into her coat, she turned abruptly and gazed deep into his eyes. “Tell me, Jacques … anyhow, it isn’t dangerous, is it?”

“What?” he asked, to gain time.

He recalled the wording of Richardley’s letter. He wished neither to lie nor to alarm her. Forcing a smile to his lips, he answered: “Dangerous? I don’t expect so.”

A glint of terror showed in her eyes. But she dropped her eyelids at once and, after a moment, bravely returned his smile.

“She’s perfect,” he told himself.

Without speaking, side by side, they walked to the nearest subway station. At the top of the stairs Jacques halted. Jenny, who had gone down the first step, turned round and faced him. The moment had come… . He placed both hands on her frail shoulders. “Till Thursday, then. Friday at the latest.”

He gazed at her with troubled eyes, on the brink of saying: “You are mine. Let’s stay together, come with me.” Then he remembered the crowd, the likelihood of street-fighting. Very quickly, under his breath, he said: “You must go now. Good-bye, dear.”

His lips parted in an ambiguous flutter—not quite a smile, not quite a kiss. Then abruptly he withdrew his hands, gave her a last lingering look, and was gone.

# Chapter XXIII

THERE was still some daylight left; the air was sultry, laden with menaces of storm. The boulevards presented an unwonted aspect; all the steel shutters of the shops were down and most of the café were closed. Under police orders the few that had stayed open had cleared their terraces of chairs and tables lest these should be used for building barricades and to leave a clear field for charges of the mounted police. People were flocking up to watch the demonstration. Few private cars were about, though some buses were still plying, honking without cease.

The crowds were particularly thick along the Boulevards Saint-Martin and Magenta, and round the C.G.T. headquarters. A never-ending stream of men and women was pouring down from Belleville Hill. Workmen, young and old, in their work clothes, who had come in from the suburbs and outlying parts of Paris, were gathering in groups that steadily grew denser. In every street-bay, at every corner, in all the roads closed for repair, squads of policemen were mustered in black swarms round police cars, ready to transport them, at a moment's notice, to any danger-point.

Vanheede and Mithoerg were waiting for Jacques in a café on the Faubourg du Temple.

On the Place de la République all traffic had been stopped, and the whole square was a seething mass of people. Jacques and his friends did their best to elbow a way across the serried crowd and join the editorial staff of the *Humanité*, who, Jacques knew, were posted at the foot of the central monument. But already it was impossible to get through to the central portion of the square where the vanguard of the procession was forming ranks.

Suddenly, with a loud rustle, like a flurry of wind rippling the sea of heads, some fifty banners, invisible till now, soared aloft over the eddying crowd. Then with the ponderous deliberation of some monstrous reptile straightening out its coils, the procession got under way and moved off toward the Porte Saint-Martin. In a few minutes, like a lava stream finding its natural channel, the surging mass had flooded the ravinelike boulevard and, swelled at every moment by affluents from side-streets, was slowly rolling westward.

Wedged in the crowd, half stifled by the heat, Jacques and his friends had linked arms, so as not to be separated. Their ears were buzzing with the low continuous roar of the human flood that bore them on, sometimes immobilizing them for a moment, then sweeping them ahead, or tossing them this side and that toward the sombre house-fronts, where every window was a mass of craning heads. Night had fallen and the arc-lamps shed a wan, tragic glow upon the teeming chaos of the streets.

"Yes," Jacques jubilated, in an ecstasy of joy and pride, "they'd best take heed! A whole nation has risen up to block the way to war. The masses have understood. They've answered the call to action. If only Rumelles could see them now!"

A longer halt than usual penned them against the pillared facade of the Gymnase Theatre. Then came a confused shouting up front, giving the impression that the vanguard, on entering the Boulevard Poissonniere, had come up against an obstacle.

After ten minutes had elapsed, Jacques lost patience. "Come on!" he said, taking little Vanheede by the hand.

Mithoerg followed, grumbling to himself, as they threaded their way through the crowd, circling round impenetrable groups, swerving left and right, but steadily gaining ground.

"There's a counter-demonstration," someone informed them. "The League of Patriots is blocking the road ahead of us."

Jacques let go of Vanheede's hand and scrambled up onto the coping of a shop-front, to see what was happening.

The banners had come to a halt at the crossing in front, beside the red building of the *Matin*. The front ranks of Patriots and Socialists were flinging abuse at each other and not a few had come to blows. There were some vigorous affrays in progress, but their area was limited. The crowd was in an ugly mood; fists were being brandished on all sides. Little black squads of police had forced their way into the mass of people, but, though they made a show of activity, did not seem disposed to intervene just yet. Then somebody waved a white flag and, as if it were a signal, the Patriots broke into a rousing "*Marseillaise*," while the Socialists riposted with the "*Internationale*," in a swelling chorus that presently drowned out all other sounds with its tempestuous refrain. Suddenly the dense mass of people began to surge and eddy like a river in spate. From side-streets right and left, detachments of police led by inspectors had charged into the mass, so as to clear the crossing. The fighting redoubled in intensity; "*Marseillaise*" and "*Internationale*" died down and swelled up again, cut across by shouts—"On to Berlin!" "*Vive la France!*" "Down with war!" Driving ahead into the thick of the fray, the police were belabouring the pacifists, who retaliated with a will. Whistles shrilled, arms and sticks were brandished, cries rose: "To hell with the police!" "Dirty swine!" "Let 'em have it!" Jacques saw the policemen fling themselves on a demonstrator, who resisted vigorously, lay him out, and fling him into one of the police cars.

Jacques was furious at being too far away to take a hand. Perhaps, he thought, if he wormed his way along the houses, he might get through to the fighting-line. In the nick of time he remembered his mission, the train to catch. Tonight he was on active service; he had no right to gratify such impulses.

A low reverberation echoed up the boulevard; in the distance helmets glinted. A squad of mounted police was trotting down the street toward the demonstrators.

"Look out! They're going to charge!"

"Let's get out of this!"

The crowd round Jacques surged back in terror. But it was caught between the onset of the mounted police and the vast rearguard of the procession still pressing forward, making retreat impossible. Perched on his ledge, as on a rock lashed by wind and wave, Jacques gripped the iron shutter to prevent himself from being dislodged by the stampede of panic-stricken men and women immediately below. He looked for his companions; they had vanished. Anyhow, they knew where to find him and would come back if it could be managed. "What a fortunate thing I didn't bring Jenny with me!" The mere thought of it made him shudder.

Horses were plunging wildly in the forefront of the crowd, knocking pedestrians over. Living jetsam—faces pale with fury or fright, bloodstained foreheads—bobbed up among the eddies. It was impossible to make out what actually was happening.

The central portion of the roadway had been cleared; under the combined onslaught of mounted police and ordinary patrolmen the pacifists had been thrown back. The road was littered with sticks and hats and wreckage, among which police officers with silver

badges and some men in mufti, presumably plain-clothes men from headquarters, were moving to and fro. Round them a cordon of police was gradually widening out in all directions till presently the full width of the boulevard was occupied by the authorities.

Like a restive flock with the sheepdogs snapping at their heels which, after a spell of huddled-up confusion, turns about and scurries in the opposite direction, the crowd turned tail and stampeded toward the Boulevards Sébastopol and Strasbourg.

"Fall in at the Drouot corner!" someone shouted.

It struck Jacques that it would be imprudent to linger where he was; should he be arrested, the only identity papers he had with him were in the name of J. S. Eberlé, student, of Geneva.

He worked his way into the Rue d'Hauteville, where he stopped and pondered. There was little hope of getting in touch again with Mithoerg and Vanheede. What should be his next move? If he made for the Rue Drouot and took part in the demonstration, there was the chance he might be arrested or, quite likely, be jammed between two police cordons and have to miss his train. He glanced at his watch. Five to eleven. The wisest course, however distasteful it might be, was obviously to turn his back on the demonstration and make for the Gare du Nord.

Some minutes later he was walking past the La Fayette Square, in front of Saint Vincent de Paul's Church. In that little garden, he and Jenny … He felt an impulse to make a pilgrimage, as to some hallowed shrine, to the bench where they had sat and talked. But the steps leading up to it were black with police.

His throat was parched. It came to his mind that quite near by, in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, there was a little tavern patronized by Socialists of the district. He could spend half an hour or so there before going to catch his train.

The backroom in which the militants usually gathered was empty. But in the public bar, some half-dozen customers were discussing with the proprietor, a Socialist of long standing, the latest news from that part of Paris, where some serious street-fighting had taken place. Near the Gare de l'Est an antiwar meeting had been forcibly dispersed, only to form again in front of the C.G.T. headquarters. There a veritable riot had ensued, necessitating a police charge. A number of people, it seemed, had been wounded, and the police stations of the district were full of people who had been arrested. There was a rumour that the superintendent of police in charge of the men on duty along the boulevards had been stabbed. One of the customers, who had come from Passy, said that he had seen the Strasbourg statue at the Place de la Concorde hung with tricolour flags and guarded by a group of young patriots under police protection. Another customer, an elderly workman with a grizzled moustache, whose coat had been torn in the fray and was now being mended by the barkeeper's wife, declared that several fragments of the procession that had been dispersed on the boulevards had joined up again at the Bourse and were marching on the Palais-Bourbon, headed by a red flag and shouting: "Down with war!"

"Aye, down with War!" the barkeeper muttered. He had seen service in '70, and taken part in the Commune. With an angry toss of his grey locks he added: "A fat lot of use it is shouting: 'Down with war!' today. It's as if you shouted: 'Stop the rain!' after the storm has broken."

This was not to the liking of the old workman, who after a long puff at his pipe retorted: "It's never too late, Charles. If you'd seen 'em this evening at the Place de la République. Thick as a shoal of herrings they was."

"I was there," Jacques put in, and moved toward the old fellow.

"Well, if you was there, young fellow, you can back me up when I say there's never been anything like it before. And I've seen some demonstrations in my time, my boy! I was there when they raised hell because of Ferrer's execution; we were a hundred thousand strong that day. And I was in the protest meeting against the military convict prisons, for the release of Roussel, you remember; we were a hundred thousand strong that time as well. And there were more than a hundred thousand of us at the Pré Saint-Gervais, to demonstrate against the three-year military service law. But tonight, how many do you think we were? Three hundred thousand? Half a million? A million? All I know is there was a solid mass of us from Belleville to the Madeleine, yelling: '*Vive la paix*!' like one man. No, boys, I ain't never seen anything like that before, and I'm an old hand at the game. Lucky the cops hadn't brought their guns or, by the look of it, there'd have been blood running in the gutters tonight. Tonight, I tell you, if we'd had the nerve, the Constitution was a goner; only somehow, damn it, we missed the chance! Aye, Charles, when we marched off from the Place de la République with all our flags flying—if at that moment some fellow had shown up that had the guts—a leader, what?—he'd have led us straight to the Elysée, and the revolution'd be begun tonight."

Beaming with pleasure, Jacques gazed at the veteran fighter. "It's postponed, that's all. We'll pull it off in a day or two, never you fear!"

As he walked to the station, his heart was full of joy. He had no trouble in getting a third-class ticket to Berlin.

On the platform he had a surprise; Vanheede and Mithoerg were there to say good-bye to him. Vanheede had lost his hat; he was looking pale, the picture of dejection. Mithoerg, on the other hand, was flushed and furious; his clenched fists made his pockets bulge. He had been arrested and given a good drubbing by the police. Then, as they were dragging him to a police car, there had been a scuffle and he had managed to break away. He described his adventure in a mixture of French and German, spluttering and spitting, and rolling rageful eyes behind his glasses.

"Don't stay here," Jacques said. "We don't want to attract attention, you know."

Vanheede had clasped Jacques's hand with sudden fervour; on the blank, blind-seeming face the pale lashes fluttered nervously, as in a tone of passionate entreaty he whispered: "Be careful, Baulthy!"

To hide his emotion, Jacques gave a cheerful laugh. "See you in Brussels on Wednesday!"

At that same moment Anne was standing in her boudoir, dressed to go out, with the telephone receiver to her ear, and gazing with misted eyes into space.

Antoine had switched off all the lights and, after a perusal of the evening papers, was dropping off to sleep. The buzz of the telephone that Léon placed on the bedside table every night made him sit up in bed. A far-away, tender voice murmured in his ear: "Is that you, Tony dear?"

"Hello? What's the matter?"

"Nothing, really."

"There must be! Tell me what it is, please." He sounded anxious.

"There's nothing wrong, I assure you. I only wanted to … to hear your voice. In bed already?"

"Yes."

"Were you asleep, darling?"

"Yes … well, almost. So everything's all right? Sure you're not worrying over anything?"

"Not a thing," she laughed. "But it's nice of you to feel anxious like that about me. I only wanted to hear your voice, that's all. Can't you understand, Tony dear, that one can get a sudden longing to … to hear a voice?"

Propped on an elbow, scowling at the light that stung his eyes, he nursed his growing irritation.

"Tony?"

"*What is it?*"

"Nothing. Only—I love you, Tony darling. If you only knew how I'd like to be in your arms tonight … at this very moment!"

Some interminable seconds passed before Antoine spoke. "Look here, Anne! Didn't I make it clear that …?"

"Yes, yes," she broke in. "I know. Don't mind. I only wanted to say good night, dearest… ."

"Good night."

He hung up first. The brittle click jarred her like a blow. Shutting her eyes, she kept the receiver to her ear, waiting for a miracle. Then, "I'm a fool!" she exclaimed almost loudly.

Absurdly she had hoped—had managed to convince herself—he would reply: "Come over to our place at once. I'll be there right away."

Flinging her gloves, hat, and bag onto the table, she adjured herself: "You're a fool! An utter fool!" And suddenly, starkly, the truth that she had kept at bay forced itself upon her: she was the miserable victim of her need for him, her need of him who had no need of her!

# Chapter XXIV

AFTER an all but sleepless night, at about eight, when the train stopped at Hamm, Jacques got out to buy the morning papers.

With one accord the German press censured Austria for having declared herself at war with Servia. Even such right-wing papers as the Pan-Germanist Post and Krupp's organ, the *Rhineland Gazette*, "deplored" the high-handed methods of Austrian diplomacy. Bold headlines announced the Kaiser's hasty return and that of the Crown Prince. Paradoxically enough, most papers, after mentioning the fact that on the Kaiser's arrival at Potsdam he had held forthwith a long and important conference with his naval and military Chiefs of Staff, expressed high hopes that, thanks to his influence, peace would be preserved.

When Jacques went back to the car he found his fellow-passengers had likewise bought the morning papers and were discussing the latest news. There were three of them: a young clergyman whose thoughtful eyes turned oftener to the open window than to the paper lying on his knees; an elderly, white-bearded man who appeared to be a Jew; and a fat, jovial German in the fifties with a smooth-shaven face and cranium. Catching Jacques's eye with a wave of the *Berliner Tageszeitung* he was holding, he addressed him in German. "I see you're interested, too, in politics. You're a foreigner, aren't you?"

"Swiss."

"French Swiss?"

"From Geneva."

"That means you get a closer view of the French than we do. The individual Frenchman is a delightful fellow, don't you think so? Why is it that as a nation they're so obnoxious?"

Jacques turned the question with a noncommittal smile.

The loquacious German made sure of having caught the clergyman's and then the Jew's eye, before proceeding. "Personally, I've travelled a lot in France, on business, and I've plenty of friends in that country. For quite a while I imagined that our desire for peace would win the French around to our way of thinking and we'd end by burying the hatchet. But no, there's nothing to be done with those fire-eaters across the frontier; they've got 'revenge' on the brain! That, of course, explains the line they're taking now."

"If Germany's so keen on peace," Jacques ventured to observe, "why doesn't she prove it to better effect today—by frankly insisting that her ally, Austria, keep the peace?"

"Why, that's what she's doing—there's no doubt about it! Read the papers, man! But look at France. If France isn't spoiling for a war, why does she back up Russia as she's doing now? You've only got to read Poincaré's speeches in Saint Petersburg. Yes, it's with France that the decision rests—for peace or war. If tomorrow Russia was informed she couldn't count on the support of the French army, she'd back down at once, she'd agree to arbitration, and we'd hear no more talk about a war."

The clergyman nodded approval; the man with the white beard likewise. He had taught law for several years at Strasbourg and cordially detested the Alsatians.

With a friendly gesture Jacques declined the fat man's offer of a cigar. For safety's sake he preferred not to be drawn into an argument, and feigned to be deep in the perusal of his papers.

The professor of law began to air his views. His opinions on Bismarck's policy in the years following 1870 were obviously prejudiced and superficial. He was, or pretended to be, unaware of the old Chancellor's desire to crush France once for all by another defeat in the field; he seemed determined to recall only the friendly moves made by the German Empire toward the French Republic —to the exclusion of all others. Under his lead the conversation took a historical turn. All three men were in accord, and the ideas they voiced were those of the great majority of Germans.

To their mind it was plain as daylight that until recent years Germany had persistently endeavoured to meet France half-way and further. The conduct of Bismarck himself was a case in point. Conciliatory to the point of rashness, he had permitted the vanquished nation to make a rapid recovery, though he might quite well have hindered it; all he would have needed to do was to put a stop to the colony-grabbing activities that had become a sort of mania with the French soon after their defeat. The Triple Alliance was not aimed at any outside power; it had come into being not as a military pact, but as a covenant among three monarchs who, alarmed by the revolutionary unrest pervading Europe, jointly guaranteed the preservation of established order. During the fifteen years from 1894 to 1909, and even after the Franco-Russian Alliance had been concluded, Germany had repeatedly invited France to co-operate in settling the political problems of the day, especially those relating to Africa. In 1904 and 1905 the government had made effort after effort, in the most cordial spirit, to come to a friendly understanding with France. Invariably France had turned down the Kaiser's appeals for an entente, and had met the most tempting proposals with mistrust, with perfidious quibbles, sometimes with open threats. If, then, the nature of the Triple Alliance had altered, the blame for it rested with the French, who, by their unaccountable military alliance with Tsarism, by the line their ministers (especially Delcassé) were taking, made it quite clear that the whole trend of their foreign policy was hostile to Germany and its object the "encircling" of the Central Powers. Thus the Triple Alliance had perforce become a weapon of defence against the activities of the Triple Entente, which openly flaunted itself in the world's eyes as a cabal of filibusters. The term was none too strong, and it was justified by facts: thanks to the Triple Entente, France had been able to lay hands on her vast Moroccan territories, Russia had been able to promote a Balkan League which would permit her some day to expand as far as Constantinople, and, lastly, thanks to the Triple Entente, England had been enabled to make her sea-power invincibly supreme in every quarter of the globe. The one obstacle to this blatantly imperialistic drive was the Germanic coalition, and all that now was needed to make absolute the world power of the Triple Entente was the disruption of that coalition. An opportunity for this had now arisen. France and Russia had promptly snatched at it; by exploiting the unrest in the Balkans and Austria's rash procedure, they aimed at making Germany repudiate her one and only faithful ally. Once embroiled with Austria, Germany would stand alone, surrounded by foes; France would have achieved the object of ten years' intrigues.

Such were the views expounded by the churchman and the Jewish professor. The fat German, however, was of the opinion that the Triple Entente had more aggressive plans in view. Russia was set on a war that would leave Germany crushed and prostrate. "Every German," he said, "who watches events with an observant eye has found his confidence in peace ebbing away year by year. He has

seen Russia building one strategic railway after another in Poland; France increasing her manpower and piling up armaments; England entering into a naval pact with Russia. The only possible explanation of these activities is that the Triple Entente intends to make sure of its supremacy by defeating the Triple Alliance in the field. They are determined, in fact, to force a war on us. If war doesn't break out this year, it certainly will in 1916, or 1917 at the latest. But"—he smiled—"the Triple Entente is counting its chickens before they're hatched. The German army is prepared. It's a dangerous game to play, challenging the might of Germany!"

The old professor approved with a smile, the clergyman with an earnest nod. With the fat man's last dictum they were wholeheartedly at one.

Jacques had stayed in Berlin on several occasions. He decided to get off at the Zoo station. In the West End there was less risk of running into people he knew.

His mysterious rendezvous in the Potsdamerplatz was not due till two hours later, and he decided to take cover meanwhile with Karl Vorlauf, who lived near by in the Uhlandstrasse. This man was a friend of Liebknecht and a good comrade of proved dependability. He was a dentist, and Jacques had every chance of finding him in at this hour.

In the waiting-room into which he was shown, two people were already seated: an old lady and a young student. When Vorlauf opened the door to summon the old lady, he shot a quick glance at

Jacques but gave no sign of recognition. Twenty minutes passed; then Vorlauf appeared again and beckoned to the student. Almost immediately he reappeared by himself.

"You, Jacques!" he exclaimed.

Though he was quite young, a strand of greying hair ribboned his brown curls. The dark eyes, deep-set and faceted with glints of gold, still had the feverish brilliance Jacques so well remembered.

"I'm on a mission," Jacques said in a low voice. "I've just come from the train and have an hour in hand. Got to lie low meanwhile."

Vorlauf showed no surprise. "I'll let Martha know you're here. Come along!"

He led Jacques to a bedroom; a woman was sitting at the window, sewing, with her back to the light. The room was cool. Jacques saw two beds side by side, a table piled with books, a basket on the floor with two Siamese cats sleeping in it. And suddenly a picture rose before him of a room, cosy and calm like this one, the room which some day he would share with Jenny.

Composedly Frau Vorlauf stuck her needle into the material on her lap, and rose. The flattish face, crowned with a wealth of flaxen tresses, conveyed an impression of placidity combined with energy. Jacques had often met her in Berlin, at Socialist gatherings, which she always attended with her husband.

"Stay as long as you like," Vorlauf said. "I've got to go back to my work."

"Do have a cup of coffee." Frau Vorlauf put the coffee-tray in front of Jacques. "Help yourself, won't you? I suppose you've come from Geneva."

"No, from Paris."

"Really?" She sounded interested. "Liebknecht thinks that just now a great deal depends on France. He says the majority of your proletariat are definitely against a war and that you've the luck of having a Socialist minister in your Cabinet today."

"Viviani? He's an ex-Socialist."

"If France chose, what a wonderful example she could set the world!"

Jacques described to her the demonstration on the boulevards. He had no trouble in understanding all she said to him, but he expressed himself in German rather laboriously.

"There was some street-fighting here as well," she said. "About a hundred people were wounded and five or six hundred were arrested. This evening there'll be more disturbances. Over fifty public antiwar meetings are taking place today, in every part of the city. At nine o'clock there's a mass meeting at the Brandenburger Tor."

"In France," Jacques remarked, "we have to contend with the shocking apathy of the middle class."

Vorlauf had just come back. "It's the same thing in Germany," he said. "Nobody seems to bother. Would you believe it, urgent though the danger is, no one in the Reichstag has moved, so far, that the Foreign Affairs Committee should be convened! The nationalists are conscious that the government's behind them, and the ferocity of their press campaign is simply incredible. Every day they clamour for martial law to be declared in Berlin, for the arrest of all the leaders of the opposition, for a ban on pacifist meetings. But there's no need to worry; we shall put a spoke in their wheel! Everywhere, in every town in Germany, the proletariat is stirring, agitating, in revolt. It's like those glorious days of October 1912, when with Ledebour and the rest of them we roused the masses with the slogan 'War against war!' The government realized then that the outbreak of a conflict between the capitalist nations would be a signal for immediate revolutionary counteraction throughout Europe. So they got scared and put the brakes on. This time, too, we'll pull it off." Jacques had risen. "What? Got to go already?"

Jacques nodded and took his leave of Frau Vorlauf.

"War against war!" she cried. Her eyes were sparkling.

"Yes, this time too the cause of peace will triumph," Vorlauf assured Jacques as he escorted him to the hall. "But—for how long? I've come to think, like many others, that a world war's inevitable, and that the revolution won't make good till we've been through one. . . ."

Jacques was reluctant to take leave of Vorlauf before hearing his opinion on one of the problems foremost in his thoughts.

"What exactly is known in Germany as to the understanding between Vienna and Berlin? What's the point of all this playacting they've been indulging in for the benefit of the rest of Europe, and what's been going on behind the scenes? In your opinion, is there complicity between them—yes or no?"

Vorlauf chuckled. "Oh, you Frenchman!"

"What do you mean?"

"It's so typically French, that 'Yes or no?' of yours. You Frenchmen have a perfect mania for clean-cut distinctions, you want every notion to be hard and fast! As if a clean-cut idea were *a priori* a correct one!"

It was Jacques's turn to laugh. Still, the remark had struck home; he fell to wondering to what extent his friend's view was justified and how far it applied to him personally.

Meanwhile Vorlauf's face had grown earnest again. "Complicity? Well, that's according! If you mean: 'Are they consciously, callously working hand in glove?' I'm not so sure of it. My answer to your question would be: yes *and* no. Of course there was some humbug in the surprise our politicians affected at the ultimatum. But, mind you, only a bit of it. The general view is that the Austrian Chancellor bamboozled our representatives, just as he bamboozled the other European chancelleries, and the most that can be said against Bethmann-Hollweg is that he acted with shocking imprudence. They say that what Berchtold submitted to the Wilhelmstrasse was an abridged, innocuous version of the ultimatum and, what's more, to make sure of enlisting Germany's support, that he promised it would be toned down still further. Bethmann believed him. In all good faith, if with extreme unwisdom, Germany pledged her word. When Bethmann, Jagow, and the Kaiser learned the real terms of the ultimatum, they were appalled."

"When did they learn its terms?"

"On the twenty-second or perhaps the twenty-third."

"That's the whole point! If it was on the twenty-second—as I was assured in Paris—that the German Foreign Office had still time to bring pressure to bear on Vienna before the dispatch of the ultimatum. And it neglected to do so!"

"No, Thibault, I sincerely believe that Berlin had too short notice; even on the night o£ the twenty-second it was too late. Too late to get Austria to modify her terms; too late to repudiate publicly the line that Austria was taking. Germany had been jockeyed into a false position and the only way open to her to save her face was to bluff it out and by intimidating Europe to win—by hook or by crook—the foolhardy diplomatic game into which she had been inveigled. That is what people here are saying, anyhow. And it's even alleged—this, too, on excellent authority—that until yesterday morning the Kaiser fancied he had carried out a masterstroke, that he could count on Russia's standing out."

"Oh, come now, that's absurd!" Jacques exclaimed. "He must have known quite well that Russia was spoiling for a war."

"Well, it's positively asserted that not till yesterday did our government realize the gravity of the situation; that they had been cornered. And that"—his face lit up with juvenile enthusiasm—"is why the demonstrations taking place tonight are so important. When a government's still undecided, such an outburst of popular feeling may very well tip the scale. You'll attend, won't you?"

Jacques shook his head and left Vorlauf without vouchsafing any explanation.

As he went down the stairs he was pondering on his German friend's remark about his mania for "clean-cut ideas," the "typically French" assumption that only what is clear is true. "No," an inner voice protested, "that's not my case. For me, ideas, whether they're clear or muddled, are never more—worse luck!—than half-truths, stepping-stones at best. And that, precisely, is my weakness."

# Chapter XXV

IT WAS striking six when Jacques entered Aschinger's Café in the Potsdamerplatz, one of the largest establishments owned by the Aschinger catering firm, which had branches in every part of Berlin. He saw Trautenbach sitting at a small table by himself, with a plate of vegetable soup before him. The German seemed absorbed in the perusal of a newspaper he had propped against the carafe, but his keen eyes were watching the entrance. He manifested no surprise and the two young men shook hands as casually as if they had last met only the day before. Jacques took a seat facing Trautenbach and ordered a plate of soup.

Trautenbach was a blond, athletic-looking Jew. He had curly, close-cropped reddish hair and a forehead massive as a young ram's; his cheeks were white and freckled, and the thick, coarse lips had hardly more colour than the cheeks.

"I was afraid they'd send me someone else," he whispered in German. "I don't trust the Swiss for this sort of job. You're just in time. Tomorrow would have been too late." He smiled with studied nonchalance, twiddling the mustard-pot now and again as if conversing on some trivial topic. "It's a tricky little business—for us, anyhow," he added cryptically. "You personally have nothing to do."

"Nothing to do?" Jacques sounded disappointed.

"Nothing except what I tell you to do."

In the same low tone, with the same look of smiling unconcern, interspersing his remarks with little amicable laughs to put off the scent anyone who might be watching them. Trautenbach outlined his plan. Following a natural bent, he had specialized as the directive "hidden hand" of a sort of secret service functioning in the interests of the international revolutionary cause. Some days previously he had obtained information that an Austrian officer, Colonel Stolbach, was coming to Berlin. It was believed that Stolbach had been sent on a secret mission, to confer with the German War Office, and there was every reason to suppose that in the present circumstances the object of his visit was to draw up with the German General Staff a scheme of cooperation with their Austrian opposite numbers. Trautenbach had conceived the daring plan of purloining the documents in the Colonel's possession and to this end had recruited two colleagues, "professionals in this line of business," as he described them with a wink, men on whose loyalty he'd "stake his last pfennig." This piece of information came as no surprise to Jacques. He knew that Trautenbach had spent many years in the Berlin underworld and had kept up contacts with members of the criminal class, contacts which he had already turned to account in the service of the cause.

Early that evening Stolbach was due to have his last interview with the War Minister. He had informed the management of the hotel where he was staying that he was catching the night train to Vienna. Thus there was no time to be lost; the documents would have to be stolen between the time when Stolbach left the ministry and his departure for the railway station.

Jacques was not asked to take part in the crime itself, and he could but own to himself that he preferred it should be so. All he had to do was to take delivery of the papers, rush them out of Germany, and hand them over as soon as possible to Meynestrel, with whom during the past few years Trautenbach had been keeping in close touch. If the papers proved to be important, the Pilot would impart their contents to the Socialist leaders who were due to meet in Brussels on the following day.

Jacques was told to go to the Friedrichstrasse station and after buying a ticket for Brussels to enter the third-class waiting-room; there he was to lie down on one of the wall-benches and pretend to be sound asleep. The documents, wrapped in a newspaper, would be surreptitiously placed near his head by a man who would leave at once without having spoken a word. These final instructions were repeated to him twice.

"Let's have another glass of beer," Trautenbach suggested, "before we part for the night's work."

Jacques had listened to him in silence, with a vague feeling of discomfort. This business of stealing documents, however useful it might be, went against the grain. When he had undertaken the mission to Berlin he had not expected to be mixed up in an enterprise of that sort. His first reaction had been a sense of relief at being asked to play only a very minor part in it. But at the same time he felt cheated, and rather vexed to find his role reduced to that of a receiver of stolen goods, a mere pawn in the game.

Before leaving Trautenbach he put him the same question as he had put to Vorlauf: Did he think the German and Austrian governments were acting in collusion?

"I can't say if there was any definite understanding between Berchtold and Bethmann. But it's quite on the cards that the Austrian General Staff and ours had fixed it up between them. I shouldn't be much surprised if our Chancellor's been hoodwinked simultaneously by the Austrian Ambassador and our own General Staff."

"Ah," Jacques exclaimed, "if only one could get some concrete evidence that the German military clique has been working hand in glove with the Austrian Staff! If only one could definitely affirm that what's leading Germany at the present moment to turn down the English proposals for a peaceful settlement is an intrigue between your generals and their accomplices in Vienna!" Unconsciously, to justify his taking part in the theft that Trautenbach had planned, he was trying to convince himself that the documents in question would do yeoman service to the Socialist cause.

"I quite agree," the German answered, "that evidence of that kind might have incalculable effects. Even the most patriotic of our Socialist leaders would no longer feel any qualms about standing up against the government. That's why it's so important to have a squint at that Austrian colonel's papers. Don't get up," he added, rising from his seat. "I'll leave first. Remember: ten-thirty at the station. And till then, you'd best lie low and steer clear of crowds. The town is overrun with police today."

The German Minister of War had not been deterred by reports of the mass demonstrations taking place in Berlin from continuing to its end the final and decisive conversation he had embarked on with the official envoy of the Austrian General Staff, Colonel Graf Stolbach von Blumenfeld.

The interview terminated at nine-fifteen in an atmosphere of extreme cordiality. His Excellency even deigned to escort his visitor to the head of the huge ceremonial staircase of the War Office. There, under the eyes of the guards on duty and an aide-de-camp, the Minister took leave of the Colonel, who courteously bowed as he shook hands. Both men were in mufti and both looked tired and

worried; the parting glance they exchanged was rife with unsaid implications. Then, tucking his fat, fawn-coloured brief-case under his arm and preceded by the aide-de-camp, the Colonel began walking down the wide, red-carpeted steps. At the foot of the staircase he turned and looked up; his Excellency had carried amiability so far as to remain standing at the top of the staircase in order to wave him a friendly adieu.

In the courtyard a War Office car was waiting. While Stolbach, lighting a cigar, settled into his place at the back of the car, the aide-de-camp bent forward to the chauffeur and told him the route to take so as to keep clear of demonstrations and avoid unpleasant incidents on the way back to the Colonel's hotel on the Kurfürstendamm.

The night was sultry. There had been a short, sharp downpour which, instead of cooling the air, had made it close and muggy. In view of possible rioting the lights in all the shops were out and, though it was not yet ten, Berlin already wore that aspect of portentous gloom which as a rule came only with the last hours of the night. Deep in thought, the Colonel gazed bemusedly at the wide vistas of the German capital. He was pleased with his day's work, the practical results achieved during his stay in Berlin, the report he would submit next day in Vienna to General von Hôtzendorf. On entering the car, he had carelessly dropped the brief-case on the seat beside him; now he picked it up and placed it on his knees. It was a handsome affair, brand-new, in fawn-coloured leather with plated locks. Though of a common pattern, it had a dignified appearance befitting it to cross the august thresholds of high officialdom. The Colonel had bought it at a fancy goods shop in the Kurfurstendamm on the day of his arrival in Berlin.

When the car stopped at the hotel, a porter dashed forward obsequiously and escorted the Colonel to the entrance-hall. Stolbach paused at the reception office to tell the clerk to have a light meal sent up to his room and his bill made out, as he was catching the night express. Then with quick strides despite his corpulence, he went to the elevator and was taken up to the first floor.

The brilliantly lighted corridor was empty but for one of the hotel staff sitting outside the servants' pantry. Stolbach had not seen this man before; he was evidently acting as a temporary substitute for the regular room-valet. The man got up on seeing the Colonel and, preceding him, opened the door of his room, turned on the light, and lowered the Venetian blind. It was a high-ceilinged room, papered in black and gold, with two tall windows. Opening into it was a blue-tiled bathroom.

"Is there anything you require, sir?"

"No, thanks. My luggage is ready. But I'd like to have a bath."

"You're leaving tonight, sir?"

"Yes."

The valet had thrown a casual glance at the brief-case which the Colonel, on entering, had placed on a chair near the door. Then, while Stolbach, after tossing his hat onto the bed, was dabbing with his handkerchief the sweat that glistened on the back of his thick, glabrous neck, he went into the bathroom and turned on the tap. When the man came back into the bedroom, he found the special envoy of the Austrian Chief of Staff stripped to the waist, in socks and mauve silk drawers. Picking up the dusty shoes lying on the carpet he said: "I'll bring them back in a minute, sir," and left the room.

There was only a thin partition between the bathroom and the servants' pantry; pressing his ear to the wall, the valet listened to every sound, meanwhile polishing the shoes he had brought with him. He smiled on hearing the Colonel's heavy bulk settling tumultuously into the water. Then he extracted from his cupboard a handsome new brief-case in fawn-coloured leather with plated locks, tightly packed with waste paper. Wrapping it in a newspaper, he put it under his arm and, carrying the shoes, knocked at the bedroom door.

"Come in!"

The servant saw at once that his plan had miscarried. The Colonel had left the bathroom door wide open; his pink, chubby head was well in view, craning over the edge of the bath.

The valet placed the shoes on the carpet and without more ado left the room, his parcel under his arm.

Stolbach let himself slip down into the bath and, with the water up to his chin, was lolling luxuriously in its gentle warmth when suddenly the lights failed; bathroom and bedroom were plunged simultaneously into darkness. Stolbach waited for a few minutes; then, as the lights showed no sign of coming on, he felt with his fingers along the wall till he found the bell-push and pressed it furiously.

He heard the valet's voice in the bedroom: "Did you ring, sir?"

"What the devil's up? Have all the lights given out in the hotel?"

"No, sir. The light's on in the pantry. I expect the fuse in your room has blown. I'll fix it up for you, sir. Just a moment."

After a while the Colonel asked: "Well, have you fixed it?"

"Not yet, sir. I ain't found the fuse-box. It should be just beside the door."

The Colonel sat up in his bath and peered into the darkness; he could hear the man fumbling about in the adjoining room. A voice came from it: "Very sorry, sir; I don't seem able to find that fuse. It must be in the corridor. I'll step outside and have a look."

The man hurried out of the room, rushed to the pantry, stowed away the Colonel's brief-case, ran back, and replaced the fuse.

Three-quarters of an hour later, after Colonel Graf Stolbach von Blumenfeld had duly sponged, perfumed, and clad his portly form, had partaken of a light meal of ham and fruit, washed down with tea, and had lit his cigar, he consulted his watch. There was time and to spare, but, as he disliked being hurried, he rang up the hotel office and asked to have his luggage taken down at once.

"No, I'll carry that myself," he said when the porter picked up the brief-case lying on the chair beside the door.

Taking it from the man, he made sure that the locks were secure, then, wedging it firmly under his arm, he left the room, after a final glance round to make sure nothing had been forgotten; for the Colonel was, first and foremost, a stickler for method.

Before taking the elevator he tried to find the room-valet, with a view to giving him a tip, and even peeped into the servants' pantry. It was empty. "Well, if the man's such a fool, so much the worse for him," the Colonel muttered. A quarter of an hour later he stepped into the Vienna express.

At almost the same moment the Genevan student, Jean Sebastien Eberlé, was stepping into the Brussels express at the Friedrichstrasse station. He had no luggage, only a parcel that looked as if it might contain a good-sized book. Trautenbach had found time to force the locks, wrap the documents in a newspaper and tie up the packet with string; he had thrown away the brief-case, as a needlessly compromising object.

Jacques was thinking: "If I get caught with these papers in German territory, there'll be the devil to pay!"

But that the fancied perils of his “mission” should have dwindled to a risk so trivial struck him as almost comical and he was furious with himself for having let Jenny be alarmed over so paltry an adventure.

Nevertheless, in the course of the journey he retired to the lavatory, opened the parcel, and stowed away the documents about his person, in his pockets and in the lining of his coat, to avoid awkward questions from the customs officers. To make doubly sure, he bought a box of cigars at one of the last German stations before the frontier, so as to have something to declare.

These precautions notwithstanding, he had some anxious moments when passing the customs. But it was not till he felt the train gathering speed on Belgian rails that he took stock of his condition, and he found he was dripping with sweat. He settled back in his corner, crossing his arms over his tightly buttoned coat, and indulged in the luxury of a few hours’ sleep.

# Chapter XXVI

THE People's House in Brussels, where, since an early hour the extraordinary meeting of the International Socialist Committee had been in progress, was buzzing like a hornets' nest in every one of its six stories. A heroic, concerted effort was being put forth to scotch the baneful activities of the imperialist powers, and to this end there had gathered in the Belgian capital not only Socialist leaders from every part of Europe but a large contingent of the militant rank and file. All were determined that the monster indignation meeting fixed for that Wednesday evening should attract world-wide attention.

Thanks to the money Meynestrel had placed at the disposal of his group—no one had ever found out how he and Richardley contrived always to replenish the secret service fund maintained at Headquarters—ten of its members had been enabled to come to Brussels. They had fixed on a *brasserie* known as the Taverne du Lion, just off the Anspacher Boulevard, as their meeting-place. Here it was that Jacques had rejoined his friends and handed over to Meynestrel the Stolbach documents.

The Pilot had at once dashed off to his hotel for a preliminary inspection of the booty in the seclusion of his room. Jacques was to join him there a little later.

Jacques's appearance was greeted with exclamations of delight. Quilleuf was the first to catch sight of him.

"Look, boys!" he roared. "There's young Thibault come back, bless his heart! … And how's yourself, lad? Hot as hell, ain't it?"

All Jacques's friends from Headquarters were gathered there: Alfreda, Richardley, Paterson, Mithoerg, Vanheede, Périnet, Saffrio the pharmacist, Sergei Pavlovitch Zelavsky, fat old Boissonis, Skada the Pundit, and even Emilie Cartier, her may-blossom complexion half hidden under a Red Cross veil that, all the way from Geneva, Quilleuf had been trying to make her remove, protesting that the weather was "too darned hot for such contraptions."

Jacques smiled with pleasure at the sight of all the friendly hands outstretched to him. He was delighted, and moved far beyond his expectation, at suddenly finding himself back in the congenial fervour of their gatherings at Geneva.

"Eh, boy," Quilleuf grinned, under the impression that Jacques had just arrived from France, "I see they've acquitted that Caillaux dame o' yours in Paris… . What'll you have? Beer, did you say? You're as bad as the rest of 'em!" For Quilleuf had a profound disdain for the "dishwater" that passed for beer in Flanders and remained faithful to his southern tipple, vermouth neat.

Quilleuf's noisy cheerfulness was symptomatic of the almost universal optimism that still prevailed in Geneva. Conversations at the Talking Shop (where of late Meynestrel had seldom put in an appearance) had rarely come down from the clouds of international idealism, and the news that had poured in of the anti-war demonstrations in the cities of Europe had been hailed with an enthusiasm that less encouraging reports had failed to dampen. And now that the Swiss group had come to Brussels and made its first contacts with the delegations from other parts of Europe, the impressive spectacle of this vast coalition against war gave most of them the feeling that the brotherhood of nations was an active reality and victory assured. True, they read in the morning papers that Austria had declared war on Servia, and the bombardment of Belgrade had actually begun in the course of the night; nevertheless, they had been convinced easily enough by the statements in an Austrian communiqué that a few shells had been dropped on the citadel alone, and the bombardment had no real weight behind it: it was to be regarded not so much as a prelude to hostilities as an emphatic warning, a symbolic gesture.

Périnet had Jacques sit down beside him. He had spent the morning at the Atlantic Café, the headquarters of the French delegation, and was full of the latest news from Paris. On the previous day a delegation of Socialist members of Parliament, headed by Jaurés and Guesde, had had a long interview with the acting Foreign Minister. After the interview the Socialist members had drawn up a manifesto emphatically declaring it was for France alone to decide what line she should adopt; in no event should the country "be plunged into an appalling war in virtue of a more or less arbitrary interpretation of certain secret treaties." They also insisted that, the official holidays notwithstanding, the House should be convoked forthwith. This showed that the French Socialists were intending to take vigorous action in the parliamentary field. Périnet had been favourably impressed by the enthusiasm and the calm, indomitable hopefulness evinced by the delegation.

Jaurés, notably, had maintained a tone of staunch confidence. Various remarks he had let fall of recent days were being retailed by his admirers. He had been heard to say to Vandervelde: "History will repeat itself; it'll be like the Agadir affair. There'll be some ups and downs, but things are absolutely bound to straighten out." And in proof of the Skipper's optimism a picturesque anecdote was going the rounds, of how, having an hour to spare after lunch, he had ambled off to the museum and spent it leisurely gazing at the van Eycks.

"I saw him," Périnet said to Jacques, "and I assure you he looked anything but discouraged. He passed just beside me, with his fat brief-case hunching up one shoulder, his straw hat, and black tail-coat—looking as usual like an old professor on his way to college. He was arm in arm with a chap I hadn't seen before. Afterward I learned it was Haase, the German. But that's not all. Just as they came past my table the German stopped and I heard him say in French—he had an accent you could cut with a knife: 'The Kaiser, he do not vant a var, not he! Much too frightened is he of ze conseqvences.' Jaurés turned to him with a smile and his eyes were sparkling. 'Well,' says he, 'just you see the Kaiser takes a firm line with the Austrians. And at our end, we'll see to it our people take a firm line with Russia.' Just in front of my table they were. I could hear every word as plain as you hear me now."

"A firm line with Russia!" Richardley muttered. "It's a bit late in the day for that!"

Jacques met his gaze and had an impression that Richardley, who in this respect was probably reflecting Meynestrel's opinions, was far from sharing in the general optimism. His impression was confirmed a moment later when, bending toward him, Richardley added under his breath: "One almost wonders if France, if those who rule France, I mean, in tolerating Russia's mobilization, in tolerating Russia's conduct—her answer to Austria's challenge by a counter-challenge, and to the German ultimatum by a plea-in-bar—haven't tacitly connived at a war."

"The Russian mobilization's only *partial*," Jacques protested, but his tone lacked conviction.

"A partial mobilization? Much the same as a general mobilization, I should say, masquerading for the moment under another name."

Mithoerg, who was sitting near Richardley and Charcovsky, suddenly roared out: “Russia! She’s mobilizing, make no mistakes about it! She’s in the hands of Tsarist *Militarismus*. All the European governments today, they are in the grip of the reactionary gang, and, what’s more, they’re under the thumbs of a regime, a system, which of its very natural makes for war. And that’s the long and short of it, *Kamerad*. The liberation of the Slavs? Just—how do you call it?—eyewashing. Tsarism’s never done nothing but oppress the Slavs. In Poland it has squashed them. In Bulgaria, it pretends to make them free so as to keep them under all the surer. Yes, indeed, it’s the old fight itching to outbreak again—between Russian *Militarismus* and Austrian *Militarismus*.”

At a neighbouring table Boissonis, Quilleuf, Paterson, and Saffrio had launched into an interminable discussion as to the German government’s projects, which grew, it seemed to them, more puzzling with each new move. Why should the Kaiser, while loudly proclaiming his desire for peace, persistently refuse to act as mediator, when a strong hint from him would have been enough to bring Franz Josef to reason and acquiescence in the signal diplomatic triumph he had already won? Germany stood to gain nothing by an Austrian incursion into Servia. And if, as the Social-Democrats alleged, the Germans did not want a war, why should they wantonly expose themselves, and Europe, to the risk of one? Paterson suggested that the attitude of England was equally hard to fathom.

“The eyes of Europe,” Boissonis remarked oracularly, “will soon be fixed on England. Now that the Austrian declaration of war has cut direct communications between Vienna and St. Petersburg, further negotiations can proceed only by way of London. Thus England’s role of mediator acquires a new importance.”

On his arrival in Brussels, Paterson had hastened to get in touch with the delegation of British Socialists, who, as he now told his friends, were greatly perturbed by a rumour that had been going round the Foreign Office. It was said that certain influential persons, who had Sir Edward Grey’s ear, were alarmed at the idea that a declaration of British neutrality might indirectly favour the bellicose intentions of the Central Powers and were therefore urging Sir Edward to make a stand or, at least, to warn Germany that if, in the event of an Austro-Russian war, British neutrality could be positively counted on, no such presumption should be made as regards a Franco-German war. The British Socialists feared Sir Edward would yield to the pressure being brought on him, all the more so as a declaration on such lines would not now come up against the same opposition in the country as it would certainly have met during the previous week. For English public opinion had been profoundly shocked by the extreme harshness of the Austrian ultimatum and Austria’s manifest determination to force a war on Servia.

Tired after his journey, Jacques listened to their conversation with a languid ear. The pleasure he had felt at seeing his friends again was evaporating more quickly than he would have wished.

He crossed over to the table where little Vanheede, Zelavsky, and Skada were conversing in undertones. “Today,” the albino was lamenting in his piping voice, “we live side by side, each for himself, without a spark of charity. That’s what we’ve got to change. And we must begin with men’s hearts. Fraternity isn’t something one can impose from outside, with laws and so on.” A brief smile lit up his face, as if he were contemplating some secret vision. “If you leave that out, well, you may be able to build up a Socialist regime, perhaps. But that won’t be socialism—not even the dawn of socialism.”

He had not noticed that Jacques had joined them. Suddenly he observed him, blushed, and stopped talking.

Skada, whose pockets were always stuffed with miscellaneous literature, had propped against his beermug some dilapidated books. Jacques glanced idly at the titles: Bakunin’s *Works*, vol. IV; Elisée Reclus, *L'Anarchie et I'Eglise*.

Skada turned to Zelavsky. Behind the enormously thick lenses of his glasses Skada’s goggle eyes looked big as two poached eggs. “Me, I haf no impazience,” he explained blandly, while with maniacal regularity his fingernails raked his close-cropped, fuzzy hair. “I do not vant ze revolution for mine own sake. In twenty, dirty, fifty years maybe vill come ze revolution. Dat I know, and dat is all I need to keep me living, doing tings.”

Richardley had begun speaking again at the far end of the room. Jacques pricked up his ears; from the young man’s vaticinations he might glean an inkling of the Pilot’s outlook on the crisis. “A war would compel the nations involved to ease the burden of debt by devaluing their currencies. And that would pitchfork them into bankruptcy. By the same token it would spell the ruin of the small investor, and cause world-wide distress. There’d be a whole host of victims of the capitalist system, up in arms against it, and they’d join in with us. And that would mean the end …!”

Mithoerg broke in before he could finish; Boissonis, Quilleuf, and Périnet all started speaking at the same time.

Jacques ceased listening. “Is it I who’ve changed?” he wondered. “Or is it they?” He was conscious of a vague uneasiness which he tried in vain to diagnose. “This threat of war has taken our group by surprise, set us at cross-purposes. Each of us has reacted in his own way, according to his temperament. We all have a desire for action, a passionate desire, but not one of us can gratify it. We’ve always been a group apart, outside the pale of action, undisciplined, unofficered. Who is to blame for that? Meynestrel, perhaps.” He looked up at the clock. “I’d better be getting back to him.”

He went up to Alfreda, who was sitting beside Paterson. “What tram will take me to your hotel?”

Paterson stood up. “Come along,” he said. “Freda and I will go a bit of the way with you.”

He was due to meet an English Socialist, a friend of Keir Hardie. Linking his arm with Jacques’s, he drew him toward the exit. Alfreda followed. Paterson was in an excited mood. The man he was to meet, a journalist, had suggested he should go to Ireland on an assignment for a Socialist paper. If the plan went through, he, Paterson, would have to leave for England next day, the first thing in the morning. He had not crossed the Channel once in the last five years, and the prospect of this trip had, as he put it, “fairly bowled him over.”

Outside, the sun blazed pitilessly down; the sidewalks were scorching underfoot. Unstirred by any breath of wind, the heat lay like a pall of fire upon the city. Coatless, puffing at his pipe, his tennis-shirt open at the neck, in his old grey flannel trousers, Paterson looked more than ever like an Oxford undergraduate on a walking tour.

Alfreda accompanied them. The dress she was wearing had paled, as a result of frequent washings, to a delicate cornflower-blue. With her black fringe, tip-turned little nose, large doll-like eyes, and air of being on her best behaviour, she looked like a little schoolgirl out for the day. As was her habit, she had listened without putting in a word. Now, however, she asked with a slight tremor in her voice: “Supposing you go to Ireland, Pat, when will you come back to Geneva?”

The young man’s face darkened. “Haven’t a notion!” he answered glumly.

She hesitated for a moment, then gazed up at him, only to drop her eyelids almost at once with a quick movement that made the shadows of the long lashes flicker on her pale cheeks.

"Will you come back?" she whispered.

"Yes." His tone was confident, emphatic. Dropping Jacques's arm, he moved up to Alfreda and laid his big paw on her shoulder with clumsy affection. "Yes, Freda. You can stake your life on that."

They walked a few steps in silence.

Paterson took his pipe from his mouth and, cocking his head on one side, fell to examining Jacques's face as if it were some curious object that had just caught his notice.

"I'm thinking about your portrait, Thibault. With another two sittings, quite short ones, I could have got the damned thing finished. Rotten bad luck! Looks as if there was a hoodoo on that portrait, doesn't it, old boy?"

He gave a hearty boyish laugh. As they were crossing a square, Paterson pointed to a small, hutchlike house at the corner of an alley. "Observe that mansion. It has the honour of sheltering William Stanley Paterson, Esquire. I've quite a big bedroom and if you like, old boy, you can share it with me—for an ounce of tobacco *per diem*."

Jacques had not yet settled where to stay.

"Right you are," he said with a smile.

"It's on the first floor, that room with the open window. Got it?"

Alfreda had stopped walking and was staring up at Paterson's window.

The Englishman turned to Jacques. "Here we part company. See the station? The Pilot's place is in the street immediately behind it."

"You'll come along with me?" Jacques asked Alfreda, supposing she would accompany him to the Pilot's rooms.

She gave a little start, then gazed at him, and in the dark, dilated pupils Jacques seemed to glimpse a tragic indecision.

There was brief silence. Then Paterson spoke in a casual tone. "No, you'll have to go there by yourself. So long, old chap."

# Chapter XXVII

FOR the last fortnight, Meynestrel had been denouncing war as passionately as any member of the group at Headquarters. But nothing had shaken his conviction that no action on the part of international socialism would avail to prevent war from breaking out. "War's an essential," he would say to Alfreda, "for the development of really revolutionary conditions. Of course one can't be sure if revolution will come as a result of this particular clash, or of a subsequent war, or of some other type of crisis. That depends on a heap of things. For instance, on who has the 'first-fruits.' Who'll bring off the first victories—the Central Powers or the Franco-Russians? There's no telling. For us, however, that's immaterial. It's up to us, just now, to act as if we were certain of being able, at an early date; to convert this imperialist war into a proletarian revolution. To intensify the present prerevolutionary conditions by every possible means. In other words, to co-ordinate all the well-meaning pacifist activities, in whatever quarter we may find them, and foster unrest in every possible way. To stir up trouble wherever we can and handicap the various governments to the utmost." Inwardly he thought: "Always provided we don't go too far. We must take care to refrain from any too effective move which might definitely stave off war."

On arriving in Brussels, he had deliberately chosen lodgings at some distance from the Taverne and was staying behind the Gare du Midi, in a small house at the end of a courtyard.

After putting in a couple of hours alone in his bedroom studying the Stolbach papers, he no longer felt the slightest doubt as to the collusion between the General Staffs of Germany and Austria; these documents proved it to the hilt. The information procured by Jacques consisted almost exclusively of memoranda jotted down by Colonel Stolbach in the course of his talks with the German High Command and the War Minister. These notes had evidently served for drafting the messages Stolbach sent to Vienna after each such interview. Not only did they throw a lurid light on the present state of the pourparlers between the respective General Staffs, but they contained many references to the immediate past which gave a clear idea of the negotiations that had been taking place between Vienna and Berlin during the last few weeks. These retrospective revelations were of the highest interest. For Meynestrel they were a confirmation of the suspicions the Viennese Socialist, Hosmer, had instructed Boehm and Jacques to impart to him in Geneva on July 12, and they enabled him to reconstruct the whole sequence of events.

Only a few days after the Sarajevo outrage, Berchtold and Hotzen-dorf had set about trying to persuade the old Emperor to take advantage of the incident, to order immediate mobilization, and to crush Servia by force of arms. But Franz Josef had proved unmanageable. He raised the objection that military action on the part of Austria would meet with the Kaiser's veto. ("Oh, ho!" Meynestrel murmured at this point. "That proves, incidentally, that he was already alive to the danger of Russian intervention and a world war.") In order to overcome the Emperor's reluctance, Berchtold had thereupon conceived the bold idea of sending his own chief private secretary, Alexander Hoyos, to Berlin, with instructions to solicit Germany's approval. As might have been expected, neither the Kaiser nor the German Chancellor would hear of any such adventure; they were much too apprehensive of Russian reactions and were not disposed to let themselves be drawn into a European war by Austria. But now the Prussian military party took a hand in the game. Hoyos found in them well-prepared and highly influential allies. Since February 1913, the German General Staff had been fully aware of the Slav peril as well as of the plots that were being hatched by Servia and Russia against Austria, and by the same token against Germany. They even suspected St. Petersburg of having, with the connivance of Belgrade, played a more or less indirect part in the Sarajevo murder. But the German generals held it for an axiom that Russia could not possibly face the risks of an immediate war and would not let herself be involved in any form of hostilities for at least two years to come—that is, until she had completed her armaments. Urged on by Hoyos, the Germany army chiefs had managed to satisfy Wilhelm II and Bethmann-Hollweg that, as things were, the danger of Russia's taking a firm line and bringing on a *general* conflict was negligible and that here was a heavensent opportunity for increasing German prestige in the eyes of the world. The upshot was that Hoyos succeeded in obtaining a free hand for Austria and took back with him to Vienna the promise that Germany would unflinchingly support her ally in all her claims. Here at last was an explanation of Austria's incomprehensible tactics during the last few weeks. It proved, moreover, that even then the Kaiser and his immediate associates more or less dimly perceived, if not the likelihood, at least the possibility of a general war.

"A lucky thing I'm the only one to have set eyes on this!" Meynestrel chuckled. "And to think I came mighty close to asking Jacques and Richardley along to lend a hand!"

He was bending over the bed, on which, for lack of space elsewhere, he had been sorting out the papers into little heaps. Taking up the memoranda he had placed on his right, all of which referred more or less to the past, to the events of early July, he put them in an envelope and sealed it, marking it No. 1.

Then he pulled up a chair and sat down. "Now let's have another squint at the rest of it." He reached toward the papers he had gathered on his left. "All this has to do with friend Stolbach's mission. This lot is the Austrian plan of campaign—strategy, technical details. Not in my line! We'll put it in envelope No. 2. Good. It's the rest that's so … enlightening. These memoranda are dated, so it's easy to follow up the progress of the 'conversations.' What exactly was the object of the mission? Roughly speaking, to speed up German mobilization. Here are the earliest papers. On arrival in Berlin, a talk with von Moltke. And so forth. The colonel urges the German Staff to push on their military preparations. 'Impossible!' he's told. 'The Chancellor won't have it, and he's backed up by the Kaiser.' Well, well! Why this opposition on Bethmann's part? 'Too early,' he declares. Just let's have a look at the reasons he gives. In the first place, reasons of home policy: he fulminates against the popular demonstrations, the attacks in Vorwärts, and so forth. That's just too bad! Yes, he's terribly put out by the violent opposition of the Social-Democrats. Secondly, reasons of foreign policy: for one thing, the need to enlist the approval of neutrals, chiefly of the English. Then he insists on the advisability of waiting for the Russian menace to become more definite; only when the imperial government's confronted with 'a patently aggressive Russia,' will it be able to satisfy both the German Socialists and the world at large that for Germany it is a case of self-defence, that she is driven to mobilize as a measure of common prudence. Good for Bethmann! There's no getting behind that! Well, then, how will Stolbach and the German generals set about forcing comrade Bethmann's hand? These documents show quite clearly how their little scheme took

form. The aim, of course, is to jockey Russia into adopting some line of action which might be construed as 'definitely provocative.' 'Why not oblige her to mobilize?' Stolbach suggests on the evening of the twenty-fifth. The wily old bird! The answer to which is: 'Exactly so! And there's only one sure way of doing it—to mobilize in Austria, and that's easily fixed up.' They're not such fools as one might think, these generals. They quite realize that, were Franz Josef to decree the mobilization of his entire army (which, Stolbach here points out, 'would no longer be merely a threat to little Servia, but an obvious challenge to imperial Russia'), the Tsar would inevitably be led to reply with a general mobilization of his own army. And being confronted with a general mobilization on the part of Russia, the Kaiser would no longer withhold his own decree for mobilization. And the Chancellor would have no further say in the matter, for a German mobilization directly due to a threat of Russian invasion could be justified in the eyes of everybody, both abroad and at home. It would satisfy not only German opinion, already worked up to fever-pitch against the Russians, but European opinion as well. Even the Social-Democrats would approve… . Yes," Meynestrel observed to himself, "that's perfectly true. Sudekum and Company have been dinning the Russian peril into our ears for ever so long, at every Congress. Bebel himself is as bad as the rest of 'em. As far back as 1900 he proclaimed that in the face of a Russian menace he would shoulder a gun. The Socialists, this time, would be hoist with their own petard. They would have to make good their words. It would be impossible for them, as Social-Democrats, not to co-operate with the government when it was a question of preparing to defend the German proletariat against Cossack imperialism… . An excellent scheme, my masters! So, very soon we'll have general mobilization in Austria. And that's why, the very next day but one after his arrival in Berlin, friend Stolbach sends wire after wire to Hôtzendorf, urging upon Austria the advisability of taking measures for a general mobilization. Capital! A Machiavellian trap set for Russia by the Berlin generals, with the complicity of Austria. And meanwhile the Kaiser and his Chancellor peacefully puff at their cigars, without an inkling of what's going on."

Meynestrel squeezed his temples between forefinger and thumb—a familiar gesture with him—then slid his hand quickly along his cheeks down to the tip of his pointed beard.

"Splendid! They're heading straight for it. And at a good pace, what's more!"

He gathered up the papers spread out on the counterpane and stuffed them into a third envelope, muttering again: "What a stroke of luck that I'm the only one to have set eyes on this!"

He leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms, and remained for a few minutes without moving.

These papers clearly represented a "new factor" of tremendous importance. With but few exceptions, the German Social-Democrats had no idea of any such intrigue between Vienna and Berlin. Even the most rabid critics of the imperial regime refused to believe the latter would be foolish enough to imperil world peace and the future of the Empire for the sake of saving Austria's face. They therefore accepted the official statements as reliable. They believed that the Wilhelmstrasse had really been taken unawares by the Austrian ultimatum and had had previous knowledge neither of its precise wording, nor of its aggressive tone, and that Germany was making a bona fide attempt to mediate between Austria and her adversaries. The better informed among them did, indeed, suspect a possible understanding between the General Staffs of Vienna and Berlin. Haase, the German delegate at Brussels, whom Meynestrel had run across in the morning, had told him how he had approached the government on the previous Sunday and reminded them emphatically that the Austro-German alliance was a strictly defensive one. He had betrayed a certain uneasiness as regards the answer he had received. "That's as it may be. But supposing Russia *did* resort to some unprovoked act of aggression against our ally, what then?" So far, however, Haase was far from suspecting that the Austrian general mobilization was actually intended to serve as a skilfully baited trap set by the German military party to lure their enemy, Russia, into war. This incontrovertible proof provided by the Stolbach papers, were it to fall into the hands of the Social-Democrat leaders, would prove a potent weapon in their fight against war. They would promptly turn upon their own ministers the furious attacks they had hitherto reserved for the Vienna government.

"It's a regular charge of dynamite!" Meynestrel muttered. "There's no telling what its effects might be if it fell into competent hands. Why, anything might happen—it might even blow the prospects of a war sky-high!"

For a few seconds, he pictured to himself the Kaiser and his Chancellor trembling at the thought of this revelation of the Austro-German intrigue, of seeing themselves exposed to a virulent press campaign which well might turn against the German government not only the German people but world opinion as well, and being faced with the alternative of either putting every Socialist leader under arrest and thus declaring war upon the whole of the German proletariat and the European Socialist International (which was hardly to be thought of), or of yielding to Socialist pressure and abruptly setting the gears into reverse—withholding from Austria the cooperation promised to Hoyos. What would ensue? Probably, for lack of German support, Austria would not dare to persevere in her warlike schemes, and would have to be content with diplomatic "conversations" ending in a compromise. And every capitalistic war plan would thus be brought to naught.

"That remains to be seen!"

He rose to his feet, took a few steps up and down the room, drank some water, returned, and seated himself once again before the documents.

"And now, Pilot, my friend, let's have no slip in our tactics. There's the choice between two alternatives. Suppose I make over these papers to a man like Liebknecht, and let scandal do its damnedest. In that case, one of two things will happen: either the scandal will prevent a war or it will not. Supposing, as is quite likely, it fails to do so, what have we to gain by it? Naturally the proletariat would go to war with the certainty of having been bamboozled. Excellent propaganda for a civil war. Yes, but the wind is blowing in the opposite direction—people everywhere are 'war-minded' already. That's quite obvious here in Brussels. Indeed, as things are, it's problematic if the leaders of social-democracy would unanimously agree to touch off the dynamite I'd hand them. Most problematic, indeed. Let's assume, however, they decide to print the documents in Vorwärts. The paper would be seized, the government would publish a categorical denial, and the mood in Germany is already such that the official denials would carry more weight than our indictments. On the other hand, let us now suppose, against all likelihood, that Liebknecht, by making the most of the resentment of the people and the world-wide indignation that would ensue, obliges the Kaiser to draw in his horns and thus prevents the outbreak of war. Obviously, in that case the influence of the Socialist International and the will to revolution of the masses would benefit. So far, so good—but by preventing a war, we'd be throwing away our best trump-card."

For a while he stared at the documents before him, weighing the implications of the decision he had now to take.

"It's unthinkable," he told himself half aloud. "Unthinkable! Why, even if there were only one chance in a hundred of preventing war, that risk must *not* be run!"

Again he pondered deeply.

"No. From whatever angle one looks at the problem—no! For the present there's only one solution—to put our dynamite into cold storage!" Stooping, he dragged a small suitcase from under the bed. "Must keep the stuff under lock and key, not breathe a word about it. Until the appointed hour …"

The "appointed hour" he had in mind was the hour when ineluctably the morale of the rank and file of the contending armies would begin to falter. Then, as a means of speeding up the general demoralization and exacerbating it, this conclusive proof of the machinations of the governments concerned would come in very handy; its disclosure would enable him to deal a knock-out blow.

A grim smile flitted across his face, the smile of a man possessed.

"How curiously things hang together!" he mused. "To some extent, perhaps, on these three envelopes I'm holding in my hand, depend vast issues, war and revolution!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Is that you, Freda?"

"No, it's Thibault."

"Ah!" Quickly he stowed away the envelopes in the suitcase and locked it before going to open the door.

Instinctively Jacques began by casting a sweeping glance round the disordered room; where were the documents?

"Didn't Freda come with you?" Meynestrel could not keep out of his voice an undertone of petulance that was almost anguish, though he mastered it at once. "I won't ask you to sit down," he added with a touch of humour, pointing to the two chairs in the room, both strewn with feminine apparel. "I was just going out, anyhow. I'd rather like to see what they're up to at the People's House."

"What about those documents?" Jacques tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

While speaking, the Pilot had pushed the suitcase under the bed. "I'm afraid Trautenbach had all his trouble for nothing," he said coolly. "And so had you."

"What!" Jacques was less mortified than dumbfounded; the idea that the documents might prove valueless had never crossed his mind. Reluctant to ask the Pilot to explain himself, he merely said: "What have you done with them?"

Meynestrel pointed a foot in the direction of the suitcase.

"I thought you intended to show them to Jaurés and Vandervelde at tonight's committee meeting."

A smile crept over Meynestrel's face, an ice-cold smile that glimmered in his eyes and hardly stirred his lips, and in the corpselike pallor of the face that smiling, keenly lucid gaze seemed so little human that Jacques shivered, looked away.

"Show them to Jaurés and Vandervelde?" Meynestrel repeated in his high falsetto. "Why, they wouldn't even find the materials for another harangue in them!" Seeing Jacques's look of disappointment, he added, dropping his sarcastic tone: "Of course I shall study all these memoranda in detail when I'm back in Geneva. But my first impression is we've drawn a blank. They deal with questions of strategy, manpower, and the like, nothing that can be of the slightest use to us at present." He had put on his coat, picked up his hat. "Will you come with me? We'll walk slowly, if you don't mind. This heat is perfectly damnable; I shan't forget in a hurry what a summer day in Brussels can be like! … What can have happened to Alfreda? She said she'd call for me. Go ahead, I'll follow."

During his walk he plied Jacques with questions about Paris, and did not mention the documents again. He was limping more than usual, and apologized for it rather testily. In the summer, especially when he had been overtiring himself, his leg-muscles hurt him as much as in the period following his flying accident. "I must look quite the wounded hero," he observed with a quick laugh. "In a month or two that'll be all the rage."

At the entrance of the People's House, as Jacques was taking leave of him, Meynestrel suddenly tapped his arm. "Tell me, Jacques, what's come over you?"

"Come over me?"

"You've changed a lot."

His keen, dark, penetrating gaze lingered attentively on Jacques.

For a moment the picture of Jenny hovered before Jacques's eyes, and he felt himself blushing. To tell a lie or to explain things was equally distasteful; smiling evasively, he looked away.

"See you later," the Pilot said, without further comment. "I'll dine with Freda at the Taverne before the meeting. We'll keep a seat for you beside us."

# Chapter XXVIII

BY EIGHT o'clock not only were the five thousand seats in the Royal Circus all occupied but there was no standing-room left and, outside, the narrow streets surrounding the Circus were already packed with a seething crowd whose numbers were reckoned by enthusiastic militants as five or six thousand at the lowest estimate.

Jacques and his friends had much difficulty in pushing through the crowd and reaching the seats allotted them.

The officials had not arrived; they had been detained at the People's House, where the International Committee was still in session. Rumour had it that the debate was fast and furious, and looked as if it would go on well into the night. Keir Hardie and Vaillant were making a determined stand to get the delegates to agree unanimously on the launching of a general strike as a preventive measure and to take active steps in their respective countries for organizing such a strike. Only thus, they argued, could socialism balk the warlike projects of the various governments. Jaurés had energetically backed their proposals, regarding which a hot debate had been in progress since early morning. The clash always came between two opposite schools of thought. Some were quite prepared to approve of the promotion of a strike in the country taking the offensive, but, in the case of a defensive war, since a country paralysed by a general strike was doomed inevitably to be invaded by the aggressor nation, they maintained that the attacked country had the right, indeed the duty, to defend itself by force of arms. This was the view of most of the Germans, of many Belgians, too, and Frenchmen, and this group confined itself to looking for a satisfactory definition of the term "aggressor nation." The other group, taking its stand on history and citing as modern instances the government-inspired news items that had been appearing lately in French, German, and Russian newspapers, would have nothing to do with theories of so-called wars in self-defence. "Once a government," they said, "makes up its mind to plunge a nation into war, it will always find some pretext for getting itself attacked, or seemingly attacked. The one and only way to outwit such tactics is to announce in advance that the weapon of a 'preventive' general strike will be resorted to in any case, that the response to any threat of war will be automatic. It is essential that this proposal should be unanimously voted *forthwith* by the Socialist leaders of all countries, in terms that leave no loophole for evasion. Only thus can our collective action against war, that one effective form of action which is the entire stoppage of the nation's industries, come into operation in the hour of peril, simultaneously in every country."

The results of the debate, in which perhaps the immediate destinies of Europe hung in the balance, were not yet known.

Jacques felt a touch on his elbow. Saffrio had just caught sight of him and edged his way to his side. "I wanted to tell you about the letter Palazzolo's just received from Mussolini. It's a grand letter, *bellissima*." He drew some sheets from the place where he had preciously bestowed them under his shirt. "I've copied the best bits. And Richardley's translated it into first-class French, for the *Beacon*. Listen to this!"

The hubbub was so great that Jacques had to bring his ear near Saffrio's lips to hear him.

"Listen to this! Here's a bit to begin with: 'War enables the bourgeoisie to confront the proletariat with terrible alternatives: either to revolt or to take a hand in the shambles. A revolt is promptly quelled in blood, and the shambles whitewashed with such fine sentiments as Duty and Patriotism.' Are you listening? Benito writes this too: 'War between nations is the bloodiest form of middle-class collaboration. The bourgeoisie gloats over such immolations of the workers on the altar of the Fatherland.' And this: 'The march of events leads inevitably to International Socialism.' Yes," he cried, passionately, "Benito says that world-wide socialism is on the way! Already the Internazionale's strong enough to save the world. You can see it here tonight: the union of the proletariat means peace on earth."

He drew himself up proudly, his eyes sparkling. He went on talking, but the growing uproar prevented Jacques from catching what he said. For the immense crowd, half stifled by the heat, was waxing restive. By way of distraction, the Belgian militants launched into their fiery hymn, "Workers of the World, Unite!" and soon everyone was joining in, in unison. Faltering at first, each voice gained, as it were, a fulcrum on its neighbour's, till not voices only but men's hearts took courage and the anthem swelled to a thunderous affirmation of their unity.

When at last the long-awaited delegates showed up at the entrance, the whole audience rose to a man, with a wild roar of joyous, friendly, triumphant acclamation. And spontaneously, unheralded, the "*Internationale*" broke from every throat, drowning the volleys of applause. When the chairman, Vandervelde, raised his hand, the singing ceased—reluctantly, it seemed. All eyes were turned toward the little knot of leaders, as silence gradually settled on the vast arena. The faces of the men on the platform had been made familiar to all by the Party newsheets, and people pointed to them, whispering names. Every nationality had responded to the summons. In this solemn hour when Europe's destinies hung in the balance, the working-class of every nation was represented on that little platform, upon which a myriad eyes converged, all alike fired with the same indomitable hope.

That collective, mutually contagious confidence redoubled when they learned from Vandervelde's lips that, at the suggestion of the German Socialists, the Committee had decided that the much-talked-of International Socialist Congress originally convened for August 23 in Vienna was to take place in Paris on the ninth. In the name of the French Party, Jaurés and Guesde promised to make all necessary arrangements, and, appealing for the hearty cooperation of their hearers, planned to give this demonstration—to be entitled "The Proletariat at War on War"—an epoch-making significance.

"At a time when two great nations are being hounded on to fight each other," said Vandervelde, "it will be an eye-opener for all concerned to see the representatives of the trade unions and working-class associations in one of these countries, with four million votes behind them, crossing the frontiers of the so-called 'enemy country,' fraternizing with the 'enemy,' and declaring their will to peace between the nations."

Haase, a Socialist member of the Reichstag, rose amid general applause. His courageous speech left no shadow of doubt as to the loyal support of the Social-Democrats.

"The Austrian ultimatum was an act of flagrant provocation. Austria is out for war. She seems to assume that Germany will back her. But we German Socialists will not tolerate the proletariat's being bound by secret treaties. This is the German proletariat's slogan: No *Intervention*, even if Russia joins in the war."

Each phrase was greeted with a burst of cheers. The forthright tone of the pronouncement came as a relief to all.

"Let our adversaries beware!" he said in conclusion. "It well may be that the working-class in every land, weary of poverty and oppression, will at long last wake from slumber and unite in building a classless world."

Morgari the Italian, the Englishman Keir Hardie, and the Russian delegate Rubanovich proceeded to address the meeting. With one voice proletarian Europe execrated the wildcat imperialism of its governments and demanded that such concessions should be made as were needed for the maintenance of peace.

When Jaurés came forward to deliver his speech there was an unprecedented storm of applause. He moved even more ponderously than usual, for he had a hard day's work behind him. His head sagged between his burly shoulders, and his hair, matted with sweat, hung in wisps over his low forehead. When, after slowly climbing the steps, he took his stand solidly, composedly, facing his audience, he brought to mind a stocky giant straining forward, bent-backed, his feet deeply planted in the soil, to stem the onrush of some catastrophic landslide.

"Citizens!" A clarion call.

By some prodigy of nature, which recurred whenever he mounted a platform, Jaurés's voice suddenly drowned the fitful clamour of the crowd and a religious hush ensued: the stillness of a forest before the storm breaks.

He seemed to ruminate a moment, clenched his fists, then abruptly crossed his stubby arms upon his chest. ("Like a seal starting in to preach," as Paterson irreverently put it.) He began speaking without haste or vehemence, with no apparent effort; nevertheless, from his first words, the full-throated clangor of his voice, like the first peals of a great cathedral bell, set the air throbbing, and suddenly the vast hall grew resonant as a belfry.

All eagerness not to miss a word, craning forward, his chin propped on his hand, Jacques gazed at the uplifted face, which seemed always rapt on some far-off prospect beyond space and time.

Jaurés had nothing new to tell. Once again he exposed the danger of policies of conquest and prestige, the shortcomings of diplomacy, the crack-brained patriotism of the chauvinists, the futility and horrors of war. His line of thought was obvious to a degree, his vocabulary rather limited, and his rhetorical effects came often from the stockin-trade demagogy. And yet these magnanimous banalities induced in the serried mass of listeners, Jacques included, a high-tension current, causing it to vibrate at the speaker's will, to thrill like a harp in the wind with anger or fraternity, hope or indignation. What was the secret of that spellbinding glamour, what the magic of the insistent voice that rose and swelled in eddies of sound above those thousands of upturned faces? Was it his faith, his poetic vision, the perfect concord of his personality, in which were so miraculously harmonized a gift for speculative word-spinning and a keen aptitude for action, a historian's clarity of judgment and a poet's fantasy, a taste for order and a zeal for revolution? That night especially an obstinate conviction that sank deep into his hearers' hearts emanated from his words, his voice, his rocklike immobility—the certitude that victory was near at hand, that already the refusal of the working-classes to co-operate was holding up the governing cabals, and it had become impossible for the forces making for war to vanquish those striving for peace.

When, after a dramatic peroration, his face convulsed, his lips flecked with foam, his body shaken by a mystic frenzy, he left the platform, the whole audience rose as one man to acclaim him. Like thunder reverberating in a mountain gorge, the din of clapping hands and stamping feet rolled from wall to wall of the huge arena, while everywhere arms shot up, frantically waving hats and handkerchiefs, newspapers, walking-sticks. Jacques pictured a' tall cornfield lashed by a stormwind. In such moments of delirious mass emotion, one word from Jaurés, a mere wave of his hand, would have sufficed to launch the crowd, in a wild onrush of fanatical enthusiasm, to storm a new Bastille under his lead.

Little by little a rhythm took form across the pandemonium of sounds. To shake off the oppression that gripped their heaving chests, the crowds once again were finding relief in song.

"Arise, ye prisoners of starvation …"

And outside the building the thousands who had been unable to enter and, despite the efforts of the police to disperse them, were massed in all the neighbouring streets, joined in the chorus of the "Internationale."

"Arise, ye prisoners of starvation,
Arise, ye wretched of the earth! …"

# Chapter XXIX

THE hall was gradually emptying. Jostled, sometimes almost swept off his feet, Jacques did his best to protect little Vanheede, who clung to him like a drowning man. Jacques kept his eyes fixed on the group, some yards away, composed of Meynestrel, Mithoerg, Richardley, Saffrio, Paterson, and Alfreda. The problem was how to get through to them. Steering Vanheede in front of him, and taking advantage of every eddy of the crowd in the direction of his friends, he contrived little by little to cover the few yards intervening. Once he had joined them, he let himself be borne helplessly along amid the crowd streaming toward the exit.

With the chorus of the "Internationale" that sometimes blared out like a trumpet-call and sometimes sank to a low drone of voices, there mingled strident yells: "Down with war!" "Socialism for ever!" "We want peace!"

Meynestrel shouted to Alfreda: "Keep close to us, little girl, or you'll be getting lost."

But Alfreda did not hear. Clinging to Paterson's arm, she was craning her head to see what was happening in front.

"Just a moment, dear!" Paterson said. Clasping his hands firmly in front of him and stooping forward, he made a sort of stirrup with his interlocked fingers, on which Alfreda, after some trouble, managed to get a foothold. Then, "Up you go!" he cried, and with a jerk straightened his back, hoisting her above the crowd. She was laughing. To keep her balance, she pressed herself against Paterson's chest. Wide with excitement, her big, doll-like eyes had a strange, barbaric glitter that night.

"I can't see a thing." There was a febrile languor in her voice. "Only a … a forest of flags."

She seemed in no hurry to get down. With her skirts flapping in his eyes, Paterson stumbled ahead.

A moment later all were outside, hardly knowing how they had got there. The crowd in the street was even thicker than in the hall, and the din so deafening and incessant that after a while they all but ceased to hear it. For some minutes the surging mass swayed this way and that uncertainly; then, as if some herd instinct gave the lead, all with one accord began forging slowly ahead across the darkness, crashing through the police cordons, drawing into their ranks the onlookers lining the sidewalks.

"Where are they leading us?" Jacques inquired.

"*Zusammen marschieren, Kamerad*" was Mithoerg's reply. His flabby cheeks were puffed and crimson, as if he had just stepped out of a Turkish bath.

"I expect we're going to demonstrate outside the government offices," Richardley remarked.

"*Wir wollen keinen Krieg! Frieden! Frieden!*" bawled Mithoerg.

Zelavsky's guttural voice joined in. "*Dóloi vóinu. Mir! Mir!*"

"Where's Freda got to?" Meynestrel asked in a low tone.

Jacques looked back over his shoulder. Immediately behind him was Richardley, holding his head high, the usual rather braggart smile playing on his lips. Then came little Vanheede between Mithoerg and Zelavsky; he had linked his arms in theirs and they seemed to be carrying him along. He was neither shouting nor singing; his cheeks were so pale as to seem translucent; his half-closed eyes were turned toward the zenith in a look of mingled ecstasy and distress. Alfreda and Paterson followed at some distance, and Jacques could only see their faces, almost touching—as though their bodies were locked in an embrace.

"Where on earth can she have got to?" Meynestrel asked again fretfully, like a blind man who has lost his dog.

On the warm summer night brooded a velvety darkness. The shop-fronts were unlit, but lights showed at some of the upper floors, and in every window were outlined black forms bending toward the street. At the junctions of the larger thoroughfares files of lightless, empty tramcars were drawn up on the rails. Streams of pedestrians were pouring in from side-streets, incessantly swelling the moving flood. Most of the demonstrators were workmen from the city and suburbs, but militant Socialists from all over the country, from Antwerp, Ghent, Liege, Namur, and all the colliery districts, had flocked in to join forces with the Brussels group and the foreign delegations. That night Brussels had become the headquarters of European pacifism.

"We've done it!" Jacques silently exulted. "Peace has triumphed. We've set up a barrier that nothing in the world is strong enough to overthrow. This crowd has only to assert its will to peace, and war's averted."

The police had given up attempting to do more than protect the Royal Palace, the park, and government buildings with a fourfold cordon. The procession passed these points without halting on its way toward the heart of the city. But, as they passed, a great roar rose in unison, challenging the lordly silence of the tall facades: "Socialism for ever!" "Down with war!"

In the forefront, groups of men in ordered ranks marched proudly under their various banners. The rest of the procession streamed after them higgledy-piggledy, like the tumultuous rout of a Flemish kermis, the women clutching their menfolks' arms, children perched on their fathers' shoulders and staring at the scene below. All were superbly conscious of being the vanguard of a world-wide force, the proletariat. Stern-eyed, with set faces, they marched ahead, rarely speaking to each other, and when they halted, all marked time in step. Bare heads shone under the street-lamps, faces rapturous with confidence, steeled with firm resolve, the proud conviction that that night the people's victory was won. And above the surging tide of marching forms rolled the long, thunderous rhythms of the "Internationale," roared out unceasingly in punctual cadence, like the beating of a vast collective heart.

Several times Jacques had an impression that Meynestrel was trying to move nearer so as to have a word with him, but each time a flurry of the crowd or a sudden increase in the tumult made this impossible.

"At last!" Jacques shouted to him. "At last we have 'mass action.' " A lingering sense of decorum led him to accompany the words with a conventional smile, but his eyes were sparkling with the same fanatic exultation as the eyes of those around him.

The Pilot made no reply. His face was hard, and his lips were set in a bitter line for which Jacques could not account.

An eddy in front made the procession waver; the vanguard had evidently come up against an obstacle. As Jacques was craning his neck to find out what was amiss, he heard the Pilot's voice in his ear, gabbling a few words in that shrill, squeaky voice which always had such a disconcerting effect on his hearers. "I rather think, my dear Jacques, that Freda won't …"

The last words were all but drowned in the general uproar, but Jacques swung round, dumbfounded; surely he had heard "… won't come back to the hotel tonight!"

Their eyes met. The Pilot's face was in shadow. The black pupils of his eyes, expressionless as a cat's, had a greenish, feral sheen.

Another sudden backwash of the crowd almost lifted them off their feet. At the Boulevard du Midi crossing, a little band of nationalists gathered round a flag had rashly tried to bar their way. The scuffle was soon over and held up the Socialist advance for a moment only, but the abrupt halt and momentary confusion had been enough to separate Jacques from Meynestrel and the others.

Carried away to the right, he was jammed against a house-front in a sort of backwater while the main stream swept Meynestrel's group resistlessly ahead. From the place where he was standing, unable to advance or retreat, he had a sudden glimpse of Paterson only a few yards away. Alfreda was still with the young Englishman. They did not notice him as they went by, but he had time to observe their faces—changed almost out of recognition. The dim light showed up in strong relief the salient features of the young man's face, giving it a curious harshness, and the eyes, usually bright with merriment, were set in an unblinking stare akin to madness. Alfreda's expression was no less changed; all the gentleness had gone out of it, giving place to a look of vulgar, brazen sensuality. It was the face of a whore; worse still, a drunken whore. Her forehead resting on Paterson's shoulder, she was screaming out the "Internationale" in a hoarse, staccato voice, as if exulting in her personal triumph, her deliverance, the victory of her instincts. What had Meynestrel said? "I rather think that Freda won't come back to the hotel tonight!"

Fear gripped his heart and, without a notion what he meant to say to them, Jacques tried to force his way in their direction, shouting "Pat!" But there was no breaking through the crowd that hemmed him in; after a few vain attempts, he gave it up. For a while he followed them with his eyes; then, when he had lost sight of them completely, yielded without resistance to the human torrent that was in full flow again.

And now he was left to himself, that mysterious entity the collective crowd-mind took possession of him. Space and time ceased to exist: his individual consciousness fell back in a dazed recession into some dark limbo of the primitive. Merged in the marching ranks of these men, his brothers, he felt he had cast away his personal self. If in the depths of his being, like a warm wellspring hidden far below the surface, there still lurked a dim awareness that he was an individual atom in a whole, an aggregate that stood for truth and justice for the greatest number, he paid no heed to it. He marched on and on, his mind void of thoughts, in a light-headed ecstasy restful as sleep.

This pleasant state lasted an hour or more—till, happening to stub his toe on the sidewalk's edge, he was jerked out of his trance. And then he knew he was dog-tired.

Channelled between dark cliffs of house-fronts, the procession was still advancing with the serene persistence of a rising tide. In the rear the singing had died away. Now and again, some repressed emotion would break bounds, a lonely voice soar in a cry: "No war! No war! Socialism for ever!" that like an early cockcrow wakened answering clamours on every side. Then calm returned and for a while all was silence but for a low sound of tramping feet, measured breathing… .

Looking for an opportunity to slip away, Jacques swerved so as to be carried to the edge of the main stream beside the dark, shuttered shop-fronts. He caught sight of a narrow side-street thronged with people watching the procession, contrived to edge his way among them, and presently reached an open space where there was a drinking-fountain inset in a wall. The water was falling cool and crystal-clear, with little, friendly gurgles. He drank greedily, held his hands beneath the flow, and, after bathing his forehead in the limpid coolness, took a deep breath. Overhead the summer night sky was bright with stars. He recalled the fighting in the streets of Paris two days before; the riots in Berlin. In every European city the masses were rising in the same vehement protest against the futile butchery of war. Similar scenes were taking place in Vienna in the Ringstrasse, in Trafalgar Square in London, on the Nevsky Prospekt in St. Petersburg, where the Cossacks were riding down the masses with drawn swords. Everywhere, in every tongue, the same cry was rising: "*Friede! Peace! Mir! La paix!*" Across the frontiers of Europe the workers were stretching forth fraternal hands toward the same ideal, in a like gesture of fervent hope. How could any qualms be felt as to the future? Very soon the clouds would lift and men of every nation set to work again building a better world.

The future … Jenny!

Suddenly her face had risen before him and all else was blotted out; the violent emotions of the past few hours gave place to a desperate longing for gentler things, for love.

He started forward again in the warm darkness. And now his one desire was to sleep. Anywhere, on the first bench he came across. He was unfamiliar with this part of the city and had no idea in what direction he was going. Suddenly, as he came into an empty square, he recognized it as the square he had crossed earlier in the day with Paterson and Alfreda. "Now for a last effort!" he adjured himself; the place where Paterson was staying must be quite near. He found it without much trouble. He had just energy enough to take off his shoes and discard coat and collar before dropping like a log onto the bed.

# Chapter XXX

HE OPENED his eyes abruptly; the room was flooded with light. It took him some seconds to regain a foothold in reality. Then he saw a man's back, someone on his knees packing a suitcase at the other end of the room… . Paterson. Could he be leaving already? What was the time?

"That you, Pat?"

Without answering, Paterson closed the suitcase, carried it to the door, then walked across to Jacques's bed. His face was pale, his gaze defiant. "I'm taking her away with me," he said in an almost aggressive tone.

His eyes blurred and swollen with fatigue, Jacques stared at him, aghast.

"Sh! Don't say anything!" Paterson broke in nervously, though Jacques had shown no sign of speaking. "I know. , . . But that's how things are—and there's nothing to be done about it."

Suddenly Jacques understood… . He gazed at the young Englishman with the look of a child just roused from sleep in the middle of a nightmare.

"She's waiting for me outside in a taxi. Her mind's made up. So is mine. She hasn't told him; she's sorry for him. She won't go and say good-bye, won't even call for her things. We're taking the first train to Ostende; we'll be in London tomorrow evening. That's how it's had to be, and there's nothing to be done about it."

Jacques had drawn his shoulders up onto the pillow; resting his head against the woodwork of the bedstead, he listened in silence.

"I'd felt like that for months," Paterson went on. He was standing motionless under the lamplight. ("That's a murderer's face," Jacques thought.) "But I never dared to speak. Not till tonight, when she told me that she, too … The poor darling, you can't imagine the life she's been leading with that man. No, he's not a man, he's less than that; he's—nothing! Oh, he did the proper thing; he told her in advance how it would be, and she accepted life with him on those terms. She thought she could stick it out. She didn't know. But now that she loves me, it's too much to ask of her. Don't judge her harshly!" he suddenly exclaimed, as though he had caught a look of reproach behind the stupefaction written on Jacques's face. "You've no idea what that man's like. There's nothing he'd draw the line at—because he's a desperate man, desperate at not being able to believe in anything, anything whatever, even in himself—because he himself *is* nothing!"

Jacques had listened without stirring; his arms stretched out before him on the bed, he was gazing up at the ceiling, his eyes still smarting with the glare. The window stood open. Mosquitoes hummed close against his ears, but he made no effort to brush them away. He felt the listlessness, mingled with a faint nausea, of one who has lost a great deal of blood.

"Everybody has a right to live!" Paterson broke out ragefully. "You can ask a man to jump into the sea to save a life, but you can't ask him to keep on holding the other fellow's head above water till he's drowned, himself. She wants to live. Well, I say she has the right to, and I'm taking her away… . What's that?"

"I'm not blaming you in any way," Jacques said quietly, without turning his head. "I'm thinking about *him*."

"You don't know him. He's capable of anything. That man is a monster, a perfect monster."

"It may kill him, Pat," Jacques said, casting a sad glance at his friend.

Paterson's mouth fell open, the pale features twitched as if he had been dealt a blow, and of a sudden the young man's face struck Jacques as so repulsive that he looked away at once. "A murderer's face," he thought again. After a short pause he went on speaking, in a low, constrained voice. "It's the Party I'm concerned about. It needs its leaders—more today than ever before. What you're doing, Pat, is a betrayal. Double-dyed treachery. Treachery on every count."

The Englishman had backed toward the door. With his cap awry, his sallow cheeks, shifty eyes, and gaping mouth, he now looked less like an assassin than an escaping burglar.

"Good night," he said. His eyes were veiled; he went out quickly without meeting Jacques's gaze.

No sooner had the door closed behind Paterson than the thought of Jenny flashed into Jacques's mind with a poignancy that was almost unbearable. He was still wondering how to account for this when he heard the sound of a car starting in the silent street below. For a long while Jacques remained sitting up in bed, staring at the closed door. Two faces came and went before his eyes: the face of a bright-eyed, smiling, light-hearted youngster—Pat, as he had known him at Geneva—and the face he had just seen with the sullen features of a dismissed servant or a thief caught red-handed and brazening out his crime. A face hideously twisted by passion, with the look that he himself must have had that night when he had cornered Jenny in the subway station. And that night had not he, too, been capable of the foulest infamies, betrayals …?

At half-past six Jacques, who had been unable to go to sleep again, hastened to the boarding-house where Meynestrel was staying.

No one was up yet except an old woman scrubbing the tiled floor in the hall. For a moment Jacques wondered whether to go upstairs or leave. But, if he was to catch the eight a.m. train, there was no question of calling in again later on, and after the night's happenings he could not bring himself to leave Brussels without seeing his friend once more.

He knocked at the Pilot's door. No answer. Was it the right door? Yes, that was No. 19, the room he had entered on the previous day. Perhaps, after a night of vain waiting, Meynestrel had fallen asleep. Jacques was about to knock again when he heard a sound of bare feet padding across toward the door and a hand fumbling with the lock. A fantastic, terrifying thought sped through his mind. Without pausing to think, he grasped the doorknob, turned it. The door swung ajar, catching Meynestrel in the chest just as he was about to turn the key.

They stared at each other. The Pilot's frozen features betrayed no visible emotion except, perhaps, a hint of annoyance. For a moment he seemed to hesitate, in half a mind to eject his visitor and close the door again. Guessing his intention and acting on the same intuition as that which had led him to turn the handle, Jacques thrust the door wide open with his shoulder and entered.

His first glance showed him that the room looked somehow different, seemed to have grown larger. Tables and chairs had been pushed against the walls, leaving an open space in the middle of the room in front of the wardrobe mirror. On the bed the counterpane was neatly drawn back, hiding the disordered sheets. The room gave an impression of having been tidied up in readiness

for some event. Meynestrel, too, looked spick and span in a pale-blue, laundry-fresh pyjama suit. Nothing was hanging on the coat-pegs, nor were there any toilet articles on the wash-stand. It looked as if everything had been packed up for a journey, in the two suitcases lying beside the window. And yet—surely the Pilot had not intended to go out barefooted, in pyjamas?

Jacques's eyes came back to his friend, who had not moved and was still gazing at him. Meynestrel did not seem quite steady on his legs; he brought to mind a patient recovering from an anaesthetic, a man who has just been snatched from the jaws of death.

"What were you going to do?" Jacques faltered.

"Eh?" Meynestrel retreated shakily toward the wall opposite the door and, as if he had not quite caught Jacques's question, murmured vaguely: "What am I going to do?" Then he sat down at the table and buried his head in his hands.

Even on the table a curious order reigned. Two sealed envelopes were aligned side by side, face downward, and on a neatly folded newspaper lay some personal effects—a fountain-pen, a wallet, a watch, a bunch of keys, and some Belgian money.

Jacques gazed silently at the bowed back for some moments, not daring to make the least movement. At last he walked toward the table. Meynestrel looked up at once.

"Hush!" he whispered, then, rising with an effort, said once more, but in a quite different tone: "What *am* I going to do? Well, old man, I'm going to get dressed, and then I'm going to clear out of this, with you."

Without looking at Jacques, he opened one of the suitcases, unpacked some clothes and laid them out on the bed, extracted a dusty pair of shoes from the newspaper they were wrapped in, and proceeded with his toilet as calmly as if he had been alone. When he had finished dressing, he went up to the table and, still taking no notice of Jacques, who was sitting some distance away from it, tore both letters into tiny fragments and tossed them into the fireplace.

Then for the first time Jacques, who had been following each of Meynestrel's movements with his eyes, noticed a large pile of ashes on the hearth; obviously some papers had recently been burned there. He was puzzled by the quantity of ashes; had Meynestrel really brought so many private papers with him? Suddenly the Stolbach dossier came to his mind and he shot a glance at the open suitcase. It was nearly empty; there was no sign of a bundle of documents. "Of course he put it in the other suitcase," Jacques said to himself, brushing aside the grotesque suspicion that fiad just entered his mind.

Meynestrel went back to the table, picked up keys, wallet, and loose change, and stowed them methodically into his pockets.

Only then did he seem to grow aware of Jacques's presence, and walked toward him. "You did well to come, old man," he said, gazing into Jacques's eyes. "Who knows? Perhaps you've done me a great service." His face was calm; a strange smile hovered on his lips. "Nothing really matters, you know. There's never anything worth setting one's heart on—and nothing that's worth fearing. Nothing in the world."

He stretched out both hands toward Jacques—a quite unlooked-for gesture. As Jacques clasped them with a rush of deep emotion, Meynestrel said softly, the enigmatic smile still playing on his lips: "*So nimm denn meine Hände, und führe mich*… . Now let's be off," he added, freeing his hands. He went up to the suitcases and picked up one of them. Jacques made as if to pick up the other. "No, that one doesn't belong to me. I'm leaving it."

In his eyes a brief smile glimmered and was gone, forlorn with desperate grief and love.

Jacques said to himself, aghast: "He's burned the documents!" but dared not put a question.

They left the room together, the Pilot limping rather more than usual. Meynestrel walked past the cashier's office in the vestibule without pausing. "What a man!" Jacques thought. "He even remembered to pay his bill!"

"Let's see now," Meynestrel said, his eyes bent on a timetable pinned to the wall beside the door. "I have an express for Geneva at seven-fifty. What about you? The eight o'clock to Paris, I suppose? You'll have just time to see me off. How well it all pans out, doesn't it?"

# PART C

## Chapter I

A BRISK, warm shower had just washed Paris clean; the noonday sun was blazing down relentlessly when Jacques alighted from the Brussels train.

He was in a gloomy mood; portents of disaster were piling up, and such impressions as he had gathered on his journey were of an alarming order. The train was packed. An atmosphere of consternation prevailed among the inhabitants of the frontier districts. Soldiers on leave and officers on furlough in that part of the country had received telegraphic orders to rejoin their regiments. Jacques had lost touch with the French delegates who were coming back from Brussels in the same train, and had had to share an overcrowded car with people from the North, who struck up conversations with their fellow-passengers, exchanged newspapers, and bandied scraps of information. Their comments betrayed at once anxiety and amazement, curiosity and even a certain scepticism, but very little panic. Indeed, it seemed that most of them were already becoming reconciled to the possibility of a war. The news that they passed round regarding the precautionary measures taken by the French government was highly significant. Already, it seemed, railways, bridges, aqueducts, and munition factories were under military surveillance. A regular army battalion was occupying the mills at Corbeil, the manager of which had been denounced by the *Action Française* as being an officer in the German army reserve. In the Paris area the waterworks were being guarded by troops. A well-dressed man, wearing a ribbon in his buttonhole, gave an elaborate, seemingly expert description of the changes which were being pushed through in the wireless installation on the Eiffel Tower to increase its efficiency. A Parisian auto manufacturer bewailed the fact that several hundred cars that had been got together for an exposition had been, if not actually requisitioned, ordered to "stand by" for further instructions.

Jacques had managed to buy a copy of the *Humanité* at the Saint-Quentin station and, to his amazement and indignation, had learned that the government had gone so far as to prohibit, at the eleventh hour, the meeting that the C.G.T. had convened for the previous day—Wednesday, July 29—at the Salle Wagram, a meeting all the workers' organizations in Paris and the suburbs had been asked to attend, for a mass antiwar demonstration. Such demonstrators as, defying the official ban, had gathered in the Ternes district had been dispersed by charges of the mounted police. Street-fighting had gone on far into the night, and some bands of militants had come close to forcing their way through to the Presidential Residence and the Home Office. The prevailing view was that Poincaré's return accounted for these high-handed measures, which seemed to indicate a definite intention on the part of the government to stem the rising tide of leftwing protest, disregarding the right of public meeting and defying the best-established principles of republican freedom.

The train was half an hour late. Jacques dropped in at the buffet for a sandwich and, as he was leaving, it, ran into an elderly journalist by the name of Louvel whom he had met several times at the Café du Progrès, and who was a subeditor on the *Guerre Sociale*. He lived out at Creil and came to Paris every day for his afternoon's work on the newspaper. They left the station together. The station yard and neighbouring buildings were still beflagged. The President's return on the previous day had been the occasion of an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm in Paris which Louvel had witnessed and now described with an emotion that took Jacques by surprise.

"I know all about that," Jacques broke in. "The papers are full of it. It's sickening. I suppose that at the *Guerre Sociale*, anyhow, you didn't join in the patriotic chorus."

"At the *Guerre Sociale*? Haven't you been reading the Chief's leaders during the last few days?"

"No. I've just come from Brussels."

"Then you're behind the times, my boy."

"You mean that Gustav Hérve …"

"Hérve's no damnfool idealist; he sees things as they are. For the last few days he's been aware that war is bound to come and it would be sheer folly—worse, a crime—to go on making difficulties for the government. Read his article of the day before yesterday, and you'll see.

"So Hérve's gone jingoist!"

"Jingoist, if you like. 'Realist' would be nearer the mark. He's honest enough to recognize that not a single act of provocation has been committed by our government, and his conclusion is that, if France is compelled to fight to keep the invader off her soil, there's been nothing in the line French policy has followed during the last few weeks to justify the proletariat in letting the government down."

"What! Did Hérve say that?"

"Yes, and he went further; he said in so many words that it would be an act of treachery. For, after all, this soil that we are called on to defend is the soil from which the French Revolution sprang."

Jacques had halted and was staring silently at Louvel. All things considered, he was not greatly surprised. He remembered that Hérve had made an emphatic stand, a fortnight earlier, against the proposals for a general strike put forward by Vaillant and Jaurés at the Congress of French Socialists.

Louvel spoke again. "Yes, my boy, you're behind the times. Just go and hear what they're saying at the *Petite République*, for instance, or at the Centre du Parti Républicain, where I was last night. Everywhere you'll find they're falling into line. Everywhere their eyes are opened. Hérve isn't the only one who's grasped the situation. It's all very fine and big, talking about the fraternity of nations. But we've got to face the facts… . Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"Anything rather than …"

"A civil war, to prevent a war with Germany, is that the great idea? As things are, you wouldn't get a man to follow you. With a foreign enemy at our gates, any attempt at a revolt would simply fizzle out. Yes, my boy, even in the workers' associations, in internationalist milieux, the great majority have come to share the views of the general public and are all for defending our frontiers against invasion. Universal brotherhood's a fine ideal, but just now it's got to bide its time; what everyone's conscious of today is a

narrower sort of bond—our *French* fraternity. And anyhow, damn it, we've put up with those Boches and their damned nonsense quite long enough! If they're spoiling for a war, well, we're ready for 'em!"

The street was suddenly invaded by a pack of newsboys, yelling at the top of their voices as they dashed past: "*Paris-Midi!*"

Louvel ran over to buy a copy of the paper. Jacques was about to follow when a taxi, cruising for fares, slowed down in front of him. He jumped into it. The first thing was to get in touch with Jenny.

"*Et tu*, Hérve!" he murmured to himself despondently. "If such men flinch, how can the others be expected to stand firm—the masses, the small fry, people who're reading daily in their papers that there are just and unjust wars, and that a war against Prussian imperialism, to have done once for all with the *Deutschland über Alles* fanatics, would be a just war, a holy war, a crusade in defence of democratic freedom?"

As the cab entered the street where the Fontanins lived, Jacques looked up toward their balcony. All the windows were open. Perhaps, he thought, her mother has come back.

No, Jenny was alone. That he recognized the moment he set eyes on her, pale but quivering with joy, as she opened the door and quickly stepped back into the shadows of the hall. She cast on him a troubled gaze but so instinct with love that he walked up to her and unthinkingly stretched out his arms. Trembling, with closed eyes, she flung herself upon his breast. Their first embrace. Neither had intended it, and it lasted only a few seconds. Suddenly, as if some urgent need, forgotten for the moment, had just come back to her, Jenny freed herself and, pointing to the hall-table on which a newspaper was lying, asked: "Is it true?"

"What?"

"What they say there about mobilization."

He picked up the newspaper. It was a copy of *Paris-Midi*, one of the many thousands that for the last hour had been spreading the alarming news in Paris. The concierge, all in a flutter, had just brought it up to the apartment.

Jacques felt the blood rush to his cheeks, as he read:

> A council of war took place last night. The Third Army Corps is on its way to the frontier. The men of the Eighth Corps have been issued their full equipment, ammunition, and field rations, and are in readiness to move at a moment's notice.

She was gazing at him, haggard with apprehension. Then, abruptly, as though she had just vanquished a long reluctance, she asked: "Supposing there's a war, Jacques, will you … will you join up?"

For five days he had been awaiting that question. He looked up and resolutely shook his head.

She thought at once: I knew it—then, brushing aside a distasteful suggestion that had crept insidiously into her mind, said to herself: It takes a lot of courage to refuse to fight.

She was the first to break the ensuing silence. "Come!" Taking his hand, she led the way. Her bedroom door stood open. After a momentary hesitation she drew him into the room. He followed, unnoticing… .

"Perhaps it isn't true," he sighed. "But it may well be true tomorrow. This war is closing in on us; there's no breaking through the vicious circle. Russia won't make the least concession; neither will Germany. In every country the men in power go on putting forward the same absurd proposals, refusing to listen to reason… ."

No, she thought, it isn't fear; he's brave. And true to himself. He shouldn't act like others; he can't give way, he must stand out of it.

Without a word she went up to him, pillowed her head on his breast. Suddenly she thought: Then I won't have to lose him; and her heart leapt with joy.

Jacques gathered her in his embrace, bending above the darkness of her hair, kissed the half-hidden forehead. Dazed with happiness, she nestled in his arms, with a vague, childish yearning to be caught up and carried far, far away, she knew not whither. Eager as she was to question him about his trip, she did not dare. By the pressure of his face alone he gently forced the small, bowed head to rise, and his lips brushed the silken smoothness of her cheek, kissing their way to the fast-closed mouth, which did not yield but did not turn aside. She felt her breath failing under the soft insistence of his lips, and slipping her hand between their faces, drew her head back a little. There was an unlooked-for serenity and thoughtfulness in her expression; never had she seemed more sure of herself, more self-composed. Passionately, but without the least roughness, he clasped her in his arms again, and she surrendered herself unresisting to his embrace, in happy trustfulness, asking no kinder gift of life than to feel herself prisoned thus in his arms. Cheek to cheek, still clinging to each other in a tranquil ecstasy, they sank onto the low sofalike bed opposite the window, and remained for several minutes without moving or speaking.

At last she said in a low voice: "And I've still no letter from Mamma."

"Ah, yes, of course. Your mother… ."

For a moment she felt indignant with him for seeming so indifferent to her natural anxiety.

"No news at all from her?"

"Only a postcard to say she'd 'arrived safely,' which she sent from the Vienna station on Monday."

This card had reached Jenny only on Wednesday morning, the previous day, and ever since then she had vainly awaited further news by each successive mail. No letter or telegram had arrived, and she was feeling desperately anxious, completely at a loss to account for her mother's silence.

Jacques's gaze was roaming vaguely round this bedroom that he had never seen before, the discovery of which would have thrilled him so profoundly had he made it some days earlier. It was a small, bright, tidy room, with a wallpaper in blue and white stripes. The mantelpiece served as dressing-table; ivory brushes and a pincushion lay on it, and some photographs were slipped into the frame of the mirror above. The white leather-bound blotter on the table was closed. Nothing was lying about, except some loosely folded newspapers.

Suddenly he murmured in Jenny's ear: "Your room …!" Then, as she made no response, he hastily changed the subject. "I never dreamt your mother would persist in going to Vienna."

"You don't know Mamma! Once she's got an idea into her head, nothing will stop her! And, now that she's there, she'll insist on carrying out her programme to the end. But—will she be able to? What do you think? Isn't it rather risky, being in Austria just now?

Do tell me what you think will happen. Supposing she stays on, will they even let her return?"

"I haven't an idea," Jacques confessed.

"What am I to do? I don't know her address. And her silence—what am I to make of it? If she'd started back, surely she'd have sent me a wire to say so. That means she has stayed in Vienna, and as she's certain to have written to me, her letters must have gone astray." With a trembling hand she pointed to the newspapers. "When you read about what's happening, you can't help feeling dreadfully alarmed."

Jenny had run out to buy the papers the first thing after getting up, and hurried back to the apartment to make sure of not missing Jacques. All morning she had been poring over them, obsessed by the perils threatening those she loved: Jacques, her mother, Daniel.

She stood up. "Daniel's written to me, too." She went and fetched a letter from the writing-case, and handed it to Jacques. Then, impulsively, with the trustfulness of a frightened child, she snuggled up against him.

Daniel made no secret of the consternation with which *Mme.* de Fontanin's journey inspired him, and he commiserated with Jenny for being left to bear the brunt of these chaotic hours alone. He advised her to go and see Antoine and the Héquets, but begged her not to be unduly alarmed; there were still hopes that the crisis would blow over. In a postscript, however, he told her that his division was under marching orders, he expected to leave Luneville that night, and it might be hard for him to communicate with her during the next days.

Her head pillowed on Jacques's breast, she watched him read the letter, gazing up at him. As he folded it and gave it back to her, he was aware that she was waiting for some heartening word from him.

"Daniel's right; there's still time for a peaceful settlement. If only the nations understood, if the masses would make up their minds to *act …!* That's what we've got to work for, up to the very last moment."

Carried away by the subject nearest his heart, he gave her a brief account of the demonstrations in Paris, Berlin, and Brussels. He told her how thrilled he had been by the sight of those enormous crowds, every man of them fired with a like enthusiasm, dauntlessly proclaiming his will to peace for all the world to hear. And suddenly he felt ashamed of lingering in this room while his comrades were on active service in the pacifist cause; he remembered the meetings set for that day in the various Socialist centres, and all the things he personally had to do, the money he had to place at the disposal of the Party at the earliest possible moment. He raised his head and, fondling Jenny's hair, said in a tone whose bluntness was softened by regret: "I can't stay with you, Jenny. There are so many things I've got to do."

She did not move but he felt her body stiffen, saw the disappointment in her eyes. He clasped her still more closely to his heart, strewing with kisses the forlorn, upturned face. He felt an infinite pity; and all the load of world-wide apprehension seemed to add its burden to this silent personal grief he knew no way of consoling.

"It's out of the question"—he sounded as if he were talking to himself—"I can't take you with me."

She gave a start, then ventured: "Why not?"

Before he had time to realize what she was doing, she had slipped from his arms, opened her wardrobe, taken out a hat and gloves.

"Jenny! I said that, but—! No, really it's out of the question. I've heaps to do, any number of people to meet. I've got to look in the *Humanité* office, at the *Libertaire*, and all sorts of other places, and, later on, to go to Montrouge. What'll you do with yourself all the time?"

"I can stay outside in the street." The note of pleading in her voice took them both by surprise. She had cast off all pride; those three days of separation had completely changed her. "I'll wait for you as long as necessary, I won't be the least drag on you. Let me come with you, Jacques, let me share your life. No, I don't ask that; I know it's impossible. But don't leave me alone here—with these dreadful papers!"

Never had he felt her so near to him; it was a new Jenny at his side, a comrade in arms. Gaily he cried: "I'll take you with me, I'll introduce you to my friends. And tonight we'll go together to the Montrouge meeting… . Come on!"

Once they were in the street, he said composedly: "The first thing is to get that business settled about my father's estate. Next, to find out how much truth there is in what they say in *Paris-Midi*."

His voice was gay; Jenny's company was making him feel in the best of spirits. He slipped his arm through hers and swung her along at a good pace toward the Luxembourg.

At the broker's office—the same thing was happening at all credit establishments, postoffices, and savings-banks—the counters were being mobbed by a people changing notes for coin. For the past two days panic conditions had prevailed on the Bourse, and the leading firms of stockbrokers had petitioned the government to sanction a moratorium permitting postponement of the July settlement till the end of August, anyhow.

The broker greeted Jacques with tokens of the utmost esteem. "You may congratulate yourself, sir, on being remarkably well informed; Had you given us your instructions two days later we shouldn't have been able to carry them out."

"I know that," Jacques replied calmly.

Some hours later, half the considerable fortune left by M. Thibault—with the exception of 250,000 francs invested in South American securities, which it had been impossible to dispose of at such short notice—had been deposited, thanks to Stefany's good offices, in discreet and competent hands. Within twenty-four hours this anonymous donation would be at the disposal of the International Socialist Committee.

# Chapter II

AT ABOUT the same hour Antoine was walking up the staircase at the Foreign Office, to give Rumelles his injection. For several days, especially since the Foreign Minister's return, Rumelles, kept busy day and night, had had to give up visiting Antoine. More than ever under the incessant strain his nerves required their daily fillip, and it had been agreed that Antoine was to call in regularly at the Ministry. He did not grudge the time thus lost; those twenty minutes spent in Rumelles's office kept him posted as to the latest moves on the diplomatic chessboard, and enabled him to believe that by a fortunate chance he was one of a favoured few Parisians really in the know.

A number of people were in the corridor and the small ante-room, waiting to see Rumelles. But the attendant, who knew Antoine, showed him in at once by a side-door.

"Well," Antoine said, taking a copy of *Paris-Midi* from his pocket, "it looks as if events are moving apace just now!"

Rumelles had risen from his seat. He was scowling. "That rag! Tear the damned thing up, please! We denied it at once; what's more, the government is going to take proceedings. Meanwhile the police have confiscated all the copies they could lay hands on."

"Ah! Then it's a lie!" Antoine exclaimed, only too eager to be reassured.

"Well—not entirely."

As he laid out his instruments on a corner of the desk, Antoine looked up and cast a searching glance at Rumelles, who was slowly undressing, with a harassed air.

"It's quite true, last night we had a pretty nasty shock!" It struck Antoine that the quality of Rumelles's voice had changed: fatigue muffled its wonted resonance. "Yes, at four this morning we were all at our posts, and I don't mind telling you our hearts were in our boots. The Secretary of War and the Minister of the Navy were summoned post-haste to the Elysee, where the Premier was awaiting them. For two hours they did, in fact, contemplate … extreme measures."

"But they didn't decide to take them?"

"In the end, no. Not for the present. The order has gone round to say that the situation looks a little better this morning. The German government has advised us that it isn't mobilizing; on the contrary, it's in active pourparlers with Vienna and St. Petersburg. So it would be unwise for us, at the moment, to take any steps that might seem …"

"But surely it's a good sign, the way Germany's behaving?"

Rumelles cut him short with a look. "It's only a blind, my dear fellow. That's all it amounts to. A gesture of moderation to try, if possible, to win Italy over to the cause of the Central Powers. A gesture that can have no practical effect; Germany knows as well as we do that, in the pass that things have come to, Austria can't, and Russia won't, draw back."

"But, it's appalling, what you're telling me… ."

"Neither Austria nor Russia. Nor the other powers, for that matter. It's just that, my dear fellow, that makes the situation so devilish. In almost every European cabinet there are men who're out for peace, but everywhere, too, just now there are others out for war. There's not a single government that hasn't found itself brought to bay by the alarming possibilities of the situation and isn't thinking: 'After all, it's a gamble—and, who knows, a war may stand us in good stead'! Yes, I assure you! Don't you realize that every European nation has always had some secret axe to grind, and if it gets involved in a world war, reckons on making something out of it?"

"Surely that's not true of us?"

"Even the most pacifist-minded of our leaders are already saying to themselves: 'After all, perhaps this is a chance of settling Germany's hash and getting back Alsace and Lorraine.' Germany feels herself 'encircled' and wants to break through the ring; England to destroy the German fleet and filch their colonies and commerce from the Germans. Yes, each country is looking beyond the catastrophe—which it still hopes to avert—and already reckoning up what it stands to gain, if a war breaks."

Rumelles's voice had sunk to a low, toneless muttering: he seemed bored to death with talking, yet too tired to make the effort of refusing speech.

"But what's going to happen?" Antoine asked. So strong was his physical repugnance for suspense and indecision, that he would almost rather have been told then and there that war had been declared, and that he had only to go to his post.

"And there's something more," Rumelles began, ignoring the question. He broke off, slowly finger-raked his shaggy mane, then buried his forehead in his hands.

It seemed as if by dint of arguing round and about these problems, hearing them threshed out from morn till night during the past two weeks, he had ceased to recognize the gravity of the political situation. With his eyes fixed on the floor, his hands pressed to his temples, he was smiling. His shirt-tails billowed round the plump, white thighs covered with a golden down. The smile, a vague, almost fatuous smile—as little "leonine" as it could be—was not meant for Antoine. It was obvious that the man was at the end of his tether; his face was puffed, and on the sallow, deeply lined forehead sweat had plastered wisps of greying hair. He had spent the last two nights at the Ministry. He was more than tired; the repeated shocks of that dramatic week had worn out his powers of resistance, had left him helpless as a fish that has been played upstream and down till it has no fight left. Thanks to the injections and the cola tablets which, despite Antoine's prohibition, he was taking every two hours, he managed somehow to get through his daily task, but in a condition resembling a sleepwalker's. The machine had been wound up and continued working, but he had the feeling that some vital part of it had snapped; it was no longer under his control.

He was in a pitiable state, but Antoine's desire to know the truth overrode his sympathy.

"Well then?"

Rumelles started and looked up, without removing his hands from his forehead. His head was buzzing and felt curiously brittle, incapable of resisting the slightest shock. No, things couldn't go on like that, something inside his skull was dangerously near the breaking-point. At that moment he would have cast everything to the wind, sacrificed his career and ambitions, for a mere half-day's rest and solitude—anywhere, even in a prison cell.

Nevertheless he spoke again, in a still lower voice. “Well, then, we *know* this much: Berlin has warned St. Petersburg that if the Russian mobilization goes any further, Germany will promptly mobilize. A sort of ultimatum.”

“But what’s there to prevent Russia from calling off her mobilization?” Antoine cried. “Weren’t we told yesterday that the Tsar was proposing matters should be referred to arbitration at The Hague?”

“Quite so; only, my dear fellow, we can’t get behind the facts. While Russia talks of arbitration, she’s mobilizing day and night.” Rumelles’s voice sounded curiously apathetic. “Russia started mobilizing, not merely without warning us, but deliberately keeping us in the dark. And *when* did she start? Some say as early as the twenty-fourth, *four days* before Austria declared war. His Excellency M. Sazonov told us quite plainly last night that Russia’s speeding up her military preparations. M. Viviani, who, I believe, is more sincere than most in his desire to avoid war at all costs, was simply horrified. If a ukase for general mobilization is officially issued tonight in St. Petersburg, it will be no surprise to any of us. As a matter of fact, that’s why a council of war was held last night. And that’s much more significant than any well-meaning proposal to refer matters to arbitration or even the ‘affectionate’ letters that are said to be passing every few hours between the Kaiser and his cousin the Tsar. Why should Russia persist in this provocative line of conduct? Is it because M. Poincaré has constantly affirmed, as a measure of prudence, that France will give military aid to Russia only in the event of Germany’s intervening? That well may be so. It almost looks as if Russia wanted to force Germany into making the aggressive move that would compel France to join in with her ally.”

He fell silent, staring glumly at his knees and patting his plump legs. Was he wondering if he should make any further disclosures? Antoine hardly thought so; he had the impression that just now Rumelles was in no state to judge what he should disclose and what keep back.

“M. Poincaré made a clever move,” he said, without looking up. “Very clever, indeed. Listen! Last night he wired to our Ambassador in St. Petersburg telling him to express the French government’s strong disapproval of the Russian mobilization.”

“Good for him!” Antoine exclaimed in innocent delight. “I’ve never been among those who think Poincaré will let us be dragged into a war.”

Rumelles paused before replying. “Poincaré’s idea,” he said at last with a faint smile that came as a surprise to Antoine, “his main idea, was to shift the responsibility from our shoulders. Now, you see, belated or not, whatever happens, that telegram has been sent; it’s there on record to prove our desire for peace. The honour of France is saved. In the nick of time. A very neat piece of work.”

A buzz came from the telephone. He picked up the receiver.

“Impossible. Tell him I can’t see any newspapermen just now. No, I can’t make an exception even in his case.”

Antoine was pondering.

“But if France wishes even at this stage to put a stop to the Russian mobilization, surely there’s a much more effective way of doing it than announcing her official ‘disapproval.’ From what you told me the other day I gather that, if Russia mobilizes *before* Germany, our treaties don’t oblige us to give aid to Russia. In which case you’ve only got to remind friend Sazonov, with a certain emphasis, of that fact, and he’ll have no choice but to put the brakes on.”

Rumelles gave a little indulgent shrug, as if he had been listening to a schoolboy airing his views. “My dear fellow, what remains of the Franco-Russian treaties of the past? History will say if I’m mistaken, but I’ve a pretty shrewd idea that, thanks to the wily game played by those arch-intriguers the Slavs—and perhaps also to the unwise trustfulness of our statesmen—our alliance with Russia was renewed *unconditionally* at some time during the last two years. Which means that France is bound, from the start, to join in any military measures taken by her ally. And I suspect,” he added in an undertone, “that it’s not our Foreign Minister’s doing.”

“Still, Viviani and Poincaré are of the same mind, aren’t they?”

“Of the same mind? Well, obviously the answer’s yes. With this reservation—that M. Viviani has always stood up against the influence of the army group. You know that before he became Premier he voted against the Three Years’ Service Act. And yesterday, too, when he got here, he seemed quite convinced that a peaceful settlement was feasible. I’d like to know his thoughts at the present moment! Last night, when he left the council of war, he looked a broken man—it was quite painful to see him! I shouldn’t be surprised if he resigns, in the event of mobilization.”

While speaking, Rumelles had moved with dragging steps to the sofa, and stretched himself on it, on his side, with his nose half buried in the cushions. “It’s the right thigh today, isn’t it, my dear doctor?” he asked, still in the rather pompous tone he had been using throughout the conversation.

Antoine bent over him to make the injection. There was a brief silence before Rumelles spoke again, his voice muffled by the cushions.

“At the start it was the Austrians who seemed deliberately out to defeat all our efforts to avert a war. Today, there’s no mistaking it, it’s Russia.” He rose and began dressing. “Yes, it’s the Russian government that has just queered the latest British proposals of mediation, by refusing to hear of any compromise. The Cabinet was hard at it all day yesterday in London; it had sketched out a programme. England proposed to recognize provisionally the occupation of Belgrade as a guarantee taken by Austria and no more, but to insist, in return, on Austria’s frankly stating her intentions. That would provide, anyhow, a starting-point for negotiations. But, of course, the unanimous consent of all the powers was needed, and Russia flatly refused to give hers. She laid it down as a primary condition that hostilities in Servia were to be officially put a stop to and the Austrian troops were to evacuate Belgrade. Well, obviously, one couldn’t expect Austria to agree to a retreat like that. So it all fell through once more. No, it’s no use hoodwinking ourselves. Russia has a cut-and-dried plan, which, I suspect, has been thought out long in advance, and she’s resolved to see it through. She won’t listen to reason, she won’t forgo a war by which she hopes to gain, and she’ll end by dragging us all into it. Yes, we’re in for it, my friend!”

He had put on his coat and was crossing the room mechanically toward the fireplace, to straighten his tie in front of the mirror above it. Half-way across, he turned and said: “And do you suppose that any of us here know what actually is happening? Far more false news than true comes in. How’s one to tell which is which? Just think, my dear fellow, during the last fortnight the telephones have been buzzing night and day in every Foreign Office and War Department, the men in charge are being worked off their feet, they haven’t a moment to sit back and think things out! Just picture to yourself the code telegrams piling up hour by hour on the tables of the Foreign Secretaries in every country, the reports pouring in of the alleged secret intentions of neighbouring countries! It’s a witch’s cauldron of news, of contradictory assertions, all equally urgent and alarming! How can one get a single clear idea in this

infernal tangle? A strictly confidential report comes in from one of our special agents telling us of an imminent, unlooked-for danger that can still be averted by a rapid counterstroke. Well, if we decide to deal that counterstroke and the news turns out to be false, our action will have made the situation worse; we may even find that we've provoked the enemy into taking some decisive step and ruined the prospects of negotiations that were on the point of being pushed through. But, supposing the danger is a real one, and we don't take action? Tomorrow it well may be too late to act… . Yes, Europe is literally staggering, like a drunken man, under this avalanche of news, half true, half false."

He was stumping up and down the room, settling his collar with a shaky hand, himself staggering a little—like Europe—under the intolerable burden of his thoughts.

"Just now everyone's throwing stones at the diplomats, poor devils," he sighed. "Yet they're the only people who might have saved the cause of peace. And quite likely they'd have managed it, had they been able to get down to it, to concentrate on the real issues; the trouble is they have to dissipate the best part of their energies on humouring the *amour-propre* of individuals and nations. Yes, it's a sad business!"

He halted beside Antoine, who was closing his instrument-case. "And then," Rumelles continued, as if he had lost the knack of silence and had to think aloud, "the diplomats and statesmen aren't the only ones controlling things at present. Here at the Quai d'Orsay, for some days past we all have had the feeling that politics, diplomacy, have had their hour. In every country another set of men is taking charge: the army. They have the whip-hand, for they speak in the name of national defence, and the civil administration has to bow to their decisions. Yes, even in the least militaristic countries, the reins of power are already in the hands of the General Staff, and when things have come to that, my dear fellow …" A slight lift of the shoulders completed the sentence, and again a joyless, almost fatuous smile hovered on his lips.

The telephone rang. For some seconds he stared at it without moving. "Yes, we're in a perfectly appalling jam," he murmured without looking up. "It's as if the gears had got locked somehow of their own accord and the engine out of control. We're heading straight for the abyss, the brakes won't act, and we're being carried downhill by our own momentum, gaining speed every second. It takes one's breath away… . The situation seems to have got out of hand. Nobody wants a war. Not a soul. Neither the statesmen nor the kings. Nobody that we know of. We all have an impression of having been stampeded, reduced to impotence, and of having been tricked—but how or by whom none can say. Everybody's doing just what he vowed he'd never do; what, only the day before, he was absolutely determined not to do. It's as if the leading men in every country had suddenly turned into automata, the puppets of ruthless occult powers that are pulling the strings from some infinitely remote point high above our heads. …"

He was still gazing bemusedly at the telephone, his hand resting on the receiver. At last he straightened himself up. Before answering the call, he waved a genial farewell to Antoine.

"See you tomorrow, old man… . Excuse me if I don't escort you to the door."

# Chapter III

WHEN he left the Ministry, Antoine was feeling so tired, so upset and on edge, that though he had a very full day's work ahead he decided for a short rest at his place before continuing his round. He kept on telling himself, without quite succeeding in making it seem plausible: "Within a month, perhaps, I'll be in uniform, plunged into the unknown."

As he was turning into the portico he saw, leaving the vestibule, a man who stopped on catching sight of him.

It was Simon de Battaincourt. "The husband!" Antoine bethought himself, on the defensive.

He had not recognized the man at once, though they had met several times in former days and once, more recently, when Anne's little daughter had been put into a plaster cast.

Simon was apologetic. "Silly of me! I thought it was your consulting-day, doctor. Anyhow, I've made an appointment for tomorrow. But I'm particularly anxious to get back to Berck tonight and, if it wouldn't inconvenience you too much …"

"What the devil does he want of me?" Antoine was thinking. His suspicions were aroused, but he was resolved to put a good face on it and not seem to shirk the interview.

"Ten minutes," he said rather unamiably. "My whole day's booked up, and I'm afraid that's the most I can spare you. Come up with me."

Wedged beside him in the stuffy elevator, disagreeably conscious of the mingling of their breaths, the odours of their bodies, Antoine felt his antipathy for the man heightened by a curious physical disgust, as he repeated to himself: "The husband … this fellow is Anne's husband."

Suddenly, with a gentle, rather boyish smile flickering on his face, Battaincourt asked abruptly: "Listen, you don't really think we'll be dragged into a war, do you?"

"I'm beginning to fear it," Antoine replied gloomily.

The young man looked aghast. "But, look here—it's unthinkable! I can't believe we've let things come to that!"

Antoine did not reply. He was fumbling with his keys. As he opened the door, he said: "Go ahead."

"I've come to ask your advice about my little Huguette," Simon began. There was something appealing in the emotion with which he uttered the little girl's name; he had come to love her as if she were his own daughter and was, indeed, devoting his life to nursing her back to health. He plunged into a detailed account of her condition. She was bearing, he said, the constant immobility imposed on her by the plaster cast, with "angelic" patience. She spent nine or ten hours a day in the open air. He had bought for her a little white donkey to draw the coffinlike wheelchair in which she always lay, to sunniest corners of the sand-dunes. In the evenings he read to her, and taught her a little history and geography.

Guiding Battaincourt toward his consulting-room, Antoine listened in silence; professional interest had got the upper hand again, and he was trying to piece together, from his companion's desultory chatter, a picture of the girl's actual state of health. Anne had passed clean out of his mind. It was only when he saw Battaincourt settling into the armchair in which his mistress had so often sat that a curiously insistent thought assailed him: "That man over there who's speaking, and has just poured out his heart to me, is a man whom I'm deceiving, cheating of his rights—and he has no idea of it."

At first the only feeling produced in him was a vague discomfort of a physical order, like the vexation caused by a distasteful, not to say, slightly revolting contact. But then Simon stopped talking rather abruptly, looking a little embarrassed, and a faint suspicion crossed Antoine's mind: "Is it possible he *knows?*"

"But I haven't come to Paris," Battaincourt said after a while, "just to tell you about my experiences as a male nurse." He paused, and Antoine could not keep out of his expression a certain eagerness, which encouraged Battaincourt to proceed. "Yes, it's because I'm up against some rather tiresome problems, and letters are so apt to be misleading, aren't they? So I preferred to come and see you and talk things over."

Antoine reflected quickly: "After all, why shouldn't he know?" In the brief silence that followed, his thoughts ran riot.

"It's this," Simon said at last. "I'm far from certain that the Berck air really agrees with Huguette." Then he launched into a long-winded description of the climate. He explained that there had been a definite slowing-down in Huguette's convalescence since Easter. The local doctor, who surely might be expected to stand up for the advantages of the Berck climate, was rather inclined to think sea air was unsuitable for his little patient. Perhaps mountain air would be better. As it happened, Mary—Huguette's English governess—had received from some English friends glowing accounts of a young doctor in the western corner of the Pyrenees who, it seemed, specialized in this type of malady and had had some quite remarkable successes.

Unmoving in his chair, Antoine gazed at the finely drawn features, with the deerlike, elongated profile, and fair, almost pallid cheeks that even the brisk air of the dunes had failed to tan. Antoine seemed to be listening, weighing the pros and cons of Battaincourt's suggestions. Actually his thoughts were far away. He was recalling what Anne, in her rare moments of expansiveness, had told him about her husband's character. She had accused him of being a "waster," treacherous, selfish, vain, and spiteful in an underhand way. Until now he had seen no reason to mistrust the portrait she had given him of the man, for she always spoke of Simon in a tone of airy detachment and disdain which seemed to vouch for her impartiality. But now that he had the original before his eyes, he was beginning to feel puzzled, hopelessly at sea.

"Don't you think I'd better take Huguette to Font-Romeu?" Battaincourt inquired.

"Certainly," Antoine murmured. "It's quite a good idea, very likely."

"Naturally I'd stay with her down there. It's the back of beyond, of course, but I don't mind, if it's likely to do the child good. As for my wife"—at the thought of Anne a look of vague distress, quickly repressed, flitted across his face—"she doesn't come to see us often at Berck," he confessed with a smile that tried to be indulgent. "Paris is so near, you understand. She's always being invited out by friends and lets herself get snowed under by her social duties. But if she settled at Font-Romeu with us, perhaps she'd manage to break away from all that."

A far-away look came into his eyes as he fondly pictured a renewal of their life together, but it could be seen that he had little real hope of it. Obviously he still loved Anne, and suffered by his love, as much as ever.

Then in an enigmatic tone he muttered: "Perhaps everything would be different."

Antoine could clearly see how, on a superficial view, Anne's opinion of Simon could be justified. Nevertheless, a conviction was forcing itself upon him with ever-increasing cogency that the man opposite him in the armchair was totally different from the portrait Anne had drawn of him. "Treacherous, selfish, spiteful!" Five minutes' observation of Battaincourt, the impression gleaned from even a brief contact with him by an observer with the slightest alertness, the least intuition, was enough to refute these epithets. On the contrary, straightforwardness, goodness of heart, and modesty shone out in everything he said, even in the clumsiness of his manners. "A weakling, yes," Antoine decided. "The prey of scruples and perhaps a bit of a fool. But a monster of duplicity—most assuredly not!"

Meanwhile Simon was tranquilly proceeding with his monologue. His gentle eyes aglow with gratitude, he was explaining that of course he would never have dreamed of taking any step of such a serious nature without first consulting Antoine. He knew Antoine's skill and devotion, and put himself unreservedly in his hands. He had even ventured to hope that Antoine might find time to run down to Berck for a few hours and see his little patient before making a final decision. Though he quite understood that under the present circumstances this might well be difficult… .

Antoine was listening intently now. He had just resolved to break with Anne for good and all. Had he really settled on this course only during these last minutes? Or was it not truer that this resolve had been hovering in the background of his mind for many a long day? Could it even be called a "resolve," this prompt, unthinking surrender to an inner need which had suddenly become urgent, ineluctable? Given the leisure for analysing his feelings, he would certainly have found that his persistence during the past week in refusing to answer Anne's telephone calls and in evading the various appointments she had tried to make with him through Léon had indicated a secret, unformulated desire to break with her. He would even have had to own to himself that, though politics might seem utterly irrelevant to his affair with Anne, the tragic hours through which Europe was passing had played their part in estranging him from her. It was as if this liaison had become unworthy of certain new emotions and dwindled to a poor and paltry thing by contrast with the world-shaking events in progress.

Be this as it might, it was Simon's visit that had led him to decide on an immediate break, and even to regard it now, unwittingly, as something already perpetrated and irrevocable. The experience of facing this forlorn, bewildered man, of accepting his confidences and consideration with a hypocritical air of innocence, of finding him, in his ignorance of the wrong that had been done him, appealing to himself as to a loyal friend—all this had been too much for Antoine. Half-formulated thoughts had gone racing through his mind. "No, it doesn't pan out. Such things shouldn't happen. That's not how life should be. I come first, yes; my pleasures, my satisfactions. But they're not all. Others may be involved, human destinies that it would be criminal to sacrifice light-heartedly. It's because of people like me and lives like mine that the world's so topsy-turvy, so full of lies, injustice, wretchedness."

The curious thing was that the moment he had made that silent, immutable decision, "Everything's over between Anne and myself," all the past seemed to be blotted out as if by magic; it was exactly as if nothing had been between them. He could look Battaincourt in the eyes without the least discomfort; could smile, give him advice and encouragement to his heart's content. When, bashful as a schoolboy, Simon said something about having "overstayed the ten minutes," Antoine laughed and gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder. They walked side by side to the hall-door in friendly conversation. Antoine even promised to come to Berck some day the next week. For the moment he had forgotten everything, even the war… . Suddenly a thought of it flashed back, and it struck him that the imminence of a catastrophe which looked as if it would play havoc with all conventional values might well account, to some extent, for his being able to take this *tête-à-tête*, singular as it was, so composedly. "In a month or two quite possibly both of us will be dead," he mused. "And, that being so, how trivial everything else seems!"

"The eight-thirty train gets you to Rang about eleven, and to Berck in time for lunch," Simon explained, beaming with delight.

"Circumstances permitting …" Antoine pointed out.

The young man's face fell; the blood left his cheeks. For a moment he pressed his clenched fist to his lips, his eyes wide with anguished apprehension. And at that moment Antoine had a positive conviction that the old Huguenot, Colonel Count de Battaincourt's son was quaking at the prospect of service in the field.

"What will become of Huguette," Battaincourt sighed, looking away from Antoine, "if I'm called up for service? She'll only have that English governess. …" At that moment both men were thinking about Anne, on almost the same lines.

Battaincourt said no more till he was on the landing. He looked back at Antoine standing in the doorway. "Which day do you join your regiment?"

"On the first day. As Medical Officer in an infantry regiment. The 54th, at Compiègne. And you?"

"The third day. As sergeant in the 4th Hussars, at Verdun."

They shook hands with almost fraternal warmth. After a last friendly wave of his hand Antoine slowly closed the door. For a moment he stayed unmoving, staring at the carpet. A vivid picture had forced itself upon his consciousness; of Sergeant Battaincourt, incongruous in his hussar's uniform, galloping at the head of his troops across the Alsatian plains.

A shrill peal of the telephone jerked him out of his musings. "I wonder if it's *she*?" A tight smile pursed his lips, and a sudden impulse came over him to hurry to the telephone and tell her brutally that it was all over. Then he heard Léon lift the receiver and say at the far end of the hall: "Yes, sir. Friday, August the seventh, at three? Professor Jeantet speaking? Very good, sir, I'll make a note of it."

Antoine was going down the stairs, turning over the pages of his pocket diary, when a sound of familiar voices on the first floor made him look up. Opening the door, he glanced into the record-room of his laboratory.

Studler and Roy were engaged in an argument. They were not wearing their white coats, and the tables and chairs were strewn with newspapers.

"Well, young fellows, is that your idea of doing your jobs?" said Antoine with a laugh.

Studler shrugged his shoulders gloomily, while Roy rose from his chair and shot a questioning glance at Antoine. "Have you seen Rumelles, Chief?"

"Yes. The news in *Paris-Midi* is false. It's been officially denied. But things are going from bad to worse." After a pause, he added glumly: "Yes, we're on the brink of the abyss."

"And meanwhile Germany's making her preparations," Studler grunted.

"So are we—thank goodness!" Roy exclaimed.

There was a pause. Then, "Our last chance of peace," Studler sighed, "lies with the working-classes. But they'll catch on only when it's too late. There's a shocking fatalism in the attitude the man in the street takes toward war. And of course it's easy to account for: people have their minds warped in school—by the way their masters talk to them about past wars, and glory, and the flag, and the fatherland, and so on—and after that, by their military service. Today we're paying dear for all that tomfoolery."

Roy kept an ironic silence.

Antoine put on his hat again. "*An revoir*," he said abruptly. "I'll never have time for all my visits. See you this evening."

After he had gone, Roy went up to the Caliph and planted himself squarely in front of him. "As we were bound to be in for it some day or other, you can't deny that the present moment suits us as well as any!"

"Oh, stop it, Roy old man!"

"No. Look here! Try to take an unprejudiced view for a change. By and large, things look pretty good for us just now. It's all to the interest of France that the war should start off as between Germany and Russia; that ensures the Russians' coming in with us, and we'll be able to take the line of standing by an ally—always the best line to take. Then, again, we've had time enough—at least I hope so—to put through our mobilization on the quiet without having had to face that famous 'lightning attack' which was the bogy of our General Staff. All of which improves our prospects."

Studler gazed at him silently.

"Look here!" Roy said again. "If you're honest with yourself, you're bound to admit that the moment's pretty well chosen for having it out with them and at long last restoring our national honour."

"Our national honour!" Studler roared, spluttering with rage.

The door opened and Jousselin entered. "Still at it, you two?" he wearily inquired.

Unlike the others, he was in his white laboratory coat. Not that he had any more illusions than they as to the future; only too well he guessed that in three weeks' time he would no longer be there to observe the results of the inoculations to which he had devoted his morning. But he made a point of carrying on as if nothing untoward was to happen. "For one thing," he had said to Antoine, a melancholy smile glimmering in the grey depths of his eyes, "for one thing, it keeps one from thinking."

"Everywhere," Studler cried with a contemptuous gesture, "they're talking the same damnfool nonsense! At this end about 'the honour of France,' over there about Austrian '*amour-propre*,' and in Russia about 'Slav prestige,' the duty of protecting the Balkan states. As if there weren't a thousand times more 'honour' in preserving peace among the nations—even if one's got to eat one's words to do it—than in launching them into the shambles of a war."

It infuriated him to see the nationalists always claiming for themselves a monopoly in noble sentiments, unselfish motives, and the heroic virtues. For, though not a member of any political party, he was well aware that the militant revolutionaries who in every capital were putting up a desperate fight against the forces making for war were, more authentically than any other group of men, inspired by feelings of the loftiest self-abnegation, by a firm resolve to spare no pains in the pursuit of an arduous ideal, by the valour and great-heartedness that are the stuff of heroism.

The Caliph was not looking at Jousselin or Roy; the trancelike fixity of his gaze brought to mind an oriental prophet rapt in his vision.

At last he seemed to waken from his trance, and continued indignantly: "National honour, indeed! Yes, they've already mobilized all the high-sounding slogans to help them drown the voice of conscience. Anything to cloak the idiocy of it all, to stifle the least glimmer of common sense! Honour, patriotism, justice, civilization! And what's behind all those fine catchwords? Commercial interests, competition for world markets, rackets put up by business men and politicians, the never-ending greed of the ruling-class in every land! Did you ever hear such nonsense? They propose to 'save civilization' by behaving like bloody savages, by giving man's basest instincts a free run. To defend the cause of justice by organized, anonymous murder, by shooting down poor devils who don't wish us any harm but have been induced by the same infernal claptrap to join up against us. It's preposterous, preposterous!"

"Hear, hear!" Roy put in disdainfully.

"Steady there, old man!" said Jousselin soothingly, placing his hand on Roy's shoulder. He shared Antoine's feelings toward Manuel Roy, the youngest of their trio. He was genuinely fond of him, though he would have been puzzled to say exactly what attracted him in the young man. Perhaps his quiet courage, his open-hearted spontaneity. In the personality of this young fire-eater, with his zest for action and his chivalrous naïveté, he discerned a certain beauty—precisely that type of beauty which could but appeal to him, a man of the laboratory and researches on the abstract plane. And he respected the'pure and selfless idealism he found in Roy, his simple faith in the regenerative virtues of war, for which quite probably he would pay with his life.

" 'Honour'!" he mused aloud. "I think we've made a great mistake in letting moral standards intrude where they have no concern—in the economic struggle that's going on between the nations of the world. That mistake has falsified, embittered the whole business, and it rules out any realistic compromise. It camouflages as a conflict of ideals and a 'holy war' what should be, and indeed is, no more than trade rivalry between competing firms."

"Caillaux, in 1911, understood that very well," the Caliph broke in excitedly. "If it hadn't been for him …"

Roy cut him short. "I suppose you'd rather see your friend Caillaux bossing it in the Foreign Office today than standing trial in court!"

"One thing's sure, my boy: if he had stayed in power, things wouldn't have come to the pass they've got to now. If it hadn't been for him, this damned war, the prospect of which seems to fill you and your fellow-patriots with such delight, would have come off three years earlier—for the greater joy of the nations. He didn't rant about 'national honour,' not he! He talked business and, in the teeth of general opposition, stuck to hard facts, kept to the level of the interests at stake. Thanks to which he was able to stave off disaster."

Seeing a glint of anger kindle in Roy's eyes, Jousselin hastened to intervene. "I quite agree that, providing statesmen can bring themselves to keep severely to hard facts, there's no quarrel between nations that can't be settled on diplomatic lines, by mutual concessions. It's easier to reconcile interests than ideas. I agree, too, that Caillaux is the man to bring it o . And, if this war materializes, I rather think that the historians—who've made so much of Cleopatra's nose!—will ascribe its due importance to that tragic revolver shot at the Figaro o ce when they're unravelling the causes of the war."

Roy emitted a self-confident gu aw. "Right! We'll let it go at that—I leave it to the future to refute you."

# Chapter IV

"LET'S go with them," Jacques had said to Jenny, referring to a dozen of his friends who had met at the Café du Croissant and were going on together to the Montrouge meeting, at which Max Bastien was to speak.

Socialist gatherings were taking place that night in all the Paris districts. Vaillant had promised to address the Belleville meeting. The students in the Latin Quarter had arranged for a meeting of their own in the Bal Bullier.

They took a bus to the Châtelet, then a tram to the Porte d'Orléans, where they changed to another tram that brought them as far as Montrouge Church. There they had to alight and make their way on foot, along crowded streets, to the disused theatre in which the gathering was taking place.

It was a stifling night and the air in this working-class suburb was full of unpleasant smells. The whole population seemed to have turned out into the streets after the evening meal; everyone looked anxious, uneasy. The larger thoroughfares were loud with the cries of newsboys selling late special editions.

Jenny kept stumbling on the cobbles that paved the old-fashioned streets. The Heavy crape veil she wore and the smell of dye the heat was bringing out of it were giving her a headache. And she felt out of place in her mourning costume among all these people in working attire; instinctively she had taken off her gloves.

Jacques, as he walked beside her, could not help seeing the effort it cost her to keep up with him, but he was chary of giving her his arm; in his friends' company he treated her as a "comrade." Now and again he shot her an encouraging glance while discussing with Stefany the latest news that had come in at the *Humanité* office.

Stefany took a hopeful view; he expected much of the agitation among the working-class which had, so he averred, blazed up into life again. Public antiwar demonstrations were growing more and more numerous. There had been a manifesto from the Socialist Party, another from the Parliamentary Socialists, another from the C.G.T., another from the Trade Union Federation of the Seine Department, another from the Freethinkers' League.

"Everywhere our people are up and doing," he declared, his dark eyes aglow with hope. "Everywhere they're bringing pressure on the government."

An Irish Socialist just back from Westphalia, who had been dining at the Croissant, had told him that that very night a monster pacifist demonstration was to take place at Essen, the headquarters of the German steel industry and of Krupp's munition works. The Irishman had gone so far as to assure him that a great many workers had decided, at secret meetings, to sabotage their jobs, so as to force the imperial government to abandon any thought of war.

In the course of the afternoon, however, an alarming rumour had gone round the editorial department of his paper. It was said that the Kaiser, after having in terms amounting to an ultimatum called on Sazonov for further information regarding the mobilization in Russia, and having received the reply that the mobilization was only "partial," but there could be no question of countermanding it, had given instructions to draw up an order for mobilization. For two hours the situation had looked desperate. Then the German Ambassador had denied the rumour in such categorical terms that it seemed certain the rumours of a German mobilization were, in fact, unfounded. It had been ascertained that the responsibility for this false alarm—a counterblast across the frontier to the canard fathered by *Paris-Midi*—lay with the *Lokalanzeiger*. Meanwhile these alternations of alarm and reassurance were keeping the public dangerously on edge, and Jaurés feared more than anything else the evil influence of such recurrent waves of panic. He was insisting on every possible occasion that the duty of each group, of every household, was to fight down these vague apprehensions, which infected people's minds with notions of an "inevitable" war in self-defence and played into the hands of the war-mongers.

"Have you seen him since he came back?" Jacques asked.

"Yes, I've just spent two hours working with him."

No sooner was the Skipper back from Belgium—even before getting in touch with the parliamentary group of Socialists and reporting to them the work done at the Brussels Congress—than he had convened his associates with a view to making plans for the International Congress to be held in Paris on August 9. The French Party had a mere ten days ahead for organizing this highly important conference and ensuring its success; there was not a moment to waste.

Jaurés's presence at the *Humanité* offices had given a fillip to the energies of his staff. He had come back greatly heartened by the firm stand taken by the German Socialists, full of confidence in the pledges they had given him, and keener than ever on speeding up the peace campaign. The conduct of the government in prohibiting the meeting at the Salle Wagram had greatly shocked him; he had promptly decided to take up the challenge of authority and give the defenders of the cause of peace a brilliant revenge, by arranging for a monster protest meeting on the following Sunday, August 2.

"Stick it out, Jenny!" Jacques touched her arm. "We're almost there."

She saw a police squad drawn up under a portico. Young men were selling copies of *La Bataille Syndicaliste* and *Le Libertaire*.

They entered a blind alley in which groups of men, absorbed in heated debate, were dawdling instead of entering the theatre. The meeting, however, had already begun, and the house was full.

"Have you come to hear Bastien?" asked a militant who was just leaving. "Seems he's kept back at the Council and won't be coming."

Greatly disappointed, Jacques was about to turn and go when he saw that Jenny was too exhausted to make a move at once. Paying no more attention to his friends, he led her to one of the front rows where he had noticed two empty seats.

The local secretary, a man named Lefaur, was seated on the stage behind a garden table.

The speaker facing the footlights was a municipal councillor. In the course of his address he announced several times that war was an "annychronism."

The audience apparently paid no attention; they were chattering among themselves.

Now and then the chairman rapped the metal table, bellowing: "Silence!"

"Have a good look at their faces," Jacques whispered. "One can almost classify revolutionaries by their looks. Some have revolution in the set of their jaws, others in the expression of their eyes."

Jenny thought: And *he* …? Instead of looking at the people near her, she scrutinized Jacques's face, his prominent, stubborn chin, his restless, rather harsh eyes, glowing with vital energy.

"Are you going to speak?" she whispered shyly. She had been asking herself that question all the way; she wanted him to speak, so as to admire him all the more, but a kind of bashfulness made her dread the prospect of it.

"I don't expect so." He slipped his hand under her arm. "I'm not much good at that sort of thing. On the few occasions when I've spoken in public, I've always been paralysed by a feeling I was being carried away by the sound of my own voice and everything I said gave a wrong twist to my ideas, actually falsified them."

That was her greatest joy: hearing him analyse himself for her benefit, and yet she usually had the impression of having already guessed all he told her about himself. While he spoke, she could feel his hand fondling her elbow, and it thrilled her so that she could think of nothing but the sensation of gentle warmth stealing up her arm.

"Always, you know," he went on, "I've a vague feeling that what I say isn't quite the truth, that I overstate what I believe. It's a ghastly feeling, I assure you!"

It was true. But it was equally true that the experience of speaking in public worked on him like a heady liquor, and that he rarely failed to establish contact, even an active intimacy, with his audience.

Another militant, a burly, bull-necked man, had replaced the previous speaker. His deep bass voice had held his audience from the start. He proceeded to hurl at them a series of peremptory assertions, so disconnected that it was impossible to follow the thread of his ideas.

"The reins of power have fallen into the hands of the exploiters of the masses. Universal suffrage? It's a fake, a rotten swindle. The workers are at the mercy of a gang of profiteers. Thanks to the capitalist armament-manufacturers and their dirty scheming, all Europe's been turned into a powder-magazine that may blow up at any moment. Say, men, are you going to let 'em turn you into cannon fodder just to earn nice fat dividends for the shareholders in Creusot's?"

Bursts of cheering greeted each of the short, breathless phrases that fell like sledge-hammer blows upon his listeners' heads. He was obviously used to applause; he stopped with a jerk after each phrase and stayed a full minute gaping at his audience as if he had a may-bug stuck in his throat.

Jacques turned to Jenny. "It's ridiculous. That's not what they should be told. The thing is to convince them that they stand for the greatest number, they have the last word. They're vaguely aware of it, but they don't *feel* it. It's something they can realize only by putting it actually, decisively, to the test. And that's still another reason why it's so important that the proletariat should win today. Once they've discovered that in actual practice they're strong enough to put an absolute stop to any aggressive policy and force their governments to back down, then, and then only, will they realize their strength and know there's nothing they can't do. And when that day comes …!"

Meanwhile the audience was beginning to weary of the spate of incoherent slogans launched at their heads. In one corner of the theatre a mild dispute had developed into a brawl.

"Silence!" roared the chairman. "Party discipline must be observed. Don't you know the orders? Keep calm, men, please keep calm!"

He was obviously terrified at the prospect of a disturbance which might bring the police in; his one desire was for the meeting to pass off quietly.

Silence was momentarily restored by the appearance of a new speaker, the last on the list. Lévy Mas, professor of history at Lakanal, was famous for his Socialist pamphleteering and his brushes with the university authorities. The theme he had chosen for his speech was a review of Franco-German relations since 1870. With a great parade of erudition he set forth the issues at stake, and had been on his feet fully twenty-five minutes before coming to deal with the Sarajevo crime. He spoke of "plucky little Servia" with a break in his voice that set the eyeglasses trembling on his pointed nose. Then he launched into an elaborate comparison between the two allied groups, between the Austro-German treaty and the Franco-Russian.

Out of all patience, his hearers were beginning to heckle the professor.

"Brass tacks! Get down to brass tacks!"

"Tell us what to *do!*"

"Yes, tell us how to stop this war!"

More and more flustered, Lefaur pleaded in vain for silence.

"It's just sickening," Jacques whispered in Jenny's ear. "All these people have come here to be given a lead, to be told what to do, in plain, practical terms. And now they're going to be sent back home with their heads stuffed with political history, and the impression that the whole business is too complicated for them to fathom and there's nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable."

Shouts were ringing out across the tumult.

"What's the truth about it? What's the government playing at?"

"We want to know the truth."

"Yes, the truth. That's the goods!"

Lévy Mas faced up to his hecklers. "You want the truth? Well, the truth is that France is a peace-loving nation and has been proving it to the hilt during the last couple of weeks—to the consternation of the imperialist powers. We may criticize our government for its domestic administration, but today it's doing its best in most difficult circumstances. It's up to us Socialists not to make those difficulties worse. Needless to say, we are disgusted by the jingoist claptrap of the bourgeois press. But one thing is sure, and it's our duty to proclaim it for all the world to hear: not a single Frenchman would refuse to defend his native soil against another invasion."

Jacques, who was boiling with rage, turned to Jenny again. "Do you hear? If he wanted to prepare these people's minds for a war he couldn't go about it better. It would be enough tomorrow to tell them that the Germans are going to attack us—and they'd obey any order that was given them, meek as lambs!"

Her gaze lingered on his face. "*You* speak to them."

Without answering, he stared at the orator. He felt the audience growing more restive every moment, and in their mood discerned an undercurrent of pent-up, generous emotion, a readiness for revolutionary action, which it was a crime not to turn to good account.

"I will!" he suddenly declared, raising his hand to ask leave to speak.

The chairman gazed at him attentively for a moment, then deliberately looked away. Jacques scribbled his name on a piece of paper, but could find no one to take it to Lefaur.

Meanwhile, in an increasing hubbub, Lévy Mas was winding up his homily. "I grant you that things have come to a highly critical pass. But we need not despair so long as the government has the full weight of public opinion behind it in seeking a peaceful solution of the crisis. Read once again the articles of our great leader Jaurés. Those swashbucklers across the frontier who are trying to pick a quarrel with us must be made to realize that our statesmen and diplomats are backed by the unanimous desire of all French Socialists to defend the cause of peace and justice."

He settled his eyeglasses, glanced at the chairman, and without more ado vanished into the wings, followed by some applause from his personal friends, interspersed with half-hearted protests and timid catcalls.

Lefaur rose to his feet, sawing the air with his arms in an appeal for silence. Under the impression that he was about to make a speech, the audience calmed down for a moment. He seized the opportunity to shout: "Comrades, I declare the meeting adjourned!"

"No!" Jacques shouted.

But already all present had turned their backs on the stage and were trooping out by the three exits leading to the alley. What with the clatter of flap-seats springing up, the din of voices raised in greeting or dispute, the noise was such that it was impossible to make oneself heard.

Jacques was bursting with rage. It was intolerable that these worthy people who had come here to be given a definite lead should leave the meeting feeling all at sea, without an idea what international socialism expected of them. He forced his way through the crowd to the edge of the orchestra pit. Beyond its dark abyss lay the stage, inaccessible. Jacques was frothing at the mouth with rage.

"I wish to address the meeting."

He edged his way along the orchestra pit as far as a stage-box, vaulted into it, and ran across the corridor, where he found a side-door leading into the wings. At last he found himself on the empty stage, shouting: "I ask to be heard!"

But his voice was drowned in a babel of other voices. In front of him yawned the dusty, dingy auditorium, three-quarters empty already. He ran up to the iron table and fell to beating it frenziedly with both fists, making it reverberate like a gong.

"Comrades, I ask to be heard!"

Those who had not yet left the theatre—some fifty men at most—looked round at the stage. Some of them shouted: "Silence! Let's hear what he has to say!"

Like a sentry sounding the alarm, Jacques went on pounding the table. He was pale, dishevelled. Swiftly his eyes raked the auditorium from end to end, and at the top of his voice he shouted: "War! War!"

A sudden hush fell on the tumult.

"War! War is at our gates. Within twenty-four hours all Europe may be plunged into a terrible war. You want to hear the truth? Well, you shall have it. Before a month is over, you who stand before me, every one of you, may be lying dead on the battlefield."

Furiously he thrust back a lock of hair that had fallen over his left eye.

"*You* don't want a war, do you? Well, they want it. And they'll force it on you. You'll bear the brunt of it, but you'll bear the blame for it as well. Because, if you choose, you can stop this war. … I can see what you're thinking. Each of you is asking himself: What's to be done? And that's why you came here tonight. Well, I've an answer for you. There *is* something to be done. There's still a way to save the situation. One way only: for all of us to band together like one man—and to say: 'No!' "

More calmly, strangely self-possessed, forcing his voice, rapping out each word so as to make sure of being heard, he went on after a moment's pause: "They say to you: 'What makes war possible is capitalism, competition between imperialist powers, high finance, the armament-manufacturers.' And it's all quite true. Only—stop and think! What is war really? Is it only a conflict of interests? Unhappily, no! It's a conflict of living men, of flesh and blood. War means nations under arms, butchering each other. And all the statesmen, bankers, high financiers, and armament-manufacturers in the world couldn't start a war if the peoples of all nations refused to let themselves be mobilized, refused to fight. Guns and rifles don't go off of their own accord. Soldiers are needed to make a war. And who are these soldiers on whom capitalists rely to carry out their money-making schemes, at the cost of their lives? Who but ourselves, the rank and file? No legal authority, no mobilization order, can have the least effect unless we choose to submit to it. We hold the trump cards, we are the masters of our fate, for we are the greatest number, and the greatest power on earth."

Something seemed to snap in his head, the walls seemed tottering around him. He had just had a sudden, shattering intuition of his responsibility. Had he been right to launch into this speech? Could he be sure the truth was in his message to these people? And, for a while he felt himself floundering helplessly in a fog of doubts, of black despondency.

Just then there was a stir at the back of the auditorium, where the stragglers who had been on their way toward the exits had changed their minds and were now slowly drifting back to the seats, like iron filings drawn by a magnet. And in a flash the cloud of doubt had lifted, dissolved into bright air. Once again all that he believed, all he meant to tell these men whose mute inquiry rose insistently toward him, seemed clear, indisputable.

He took a step toward the footlights and, leaning forward, cried: "Don't believe the papers! They're full of lies!"

"Bravo!" someone shouted.

"Everywhere the newspapers are in the pay of nationalism. To whitewash their sordid ambitions, every government maintains a venal horde of newspapers whose task it is to gull the public; to urge them into the shambles; to convince them that the men who fall are heroically sacrificing their lives in a holy war, for the defence of their native soil, for the triumph of right, of freedom, civilization, justice. As if there could ever be *just* wars! As if it could be just to doom millions of innocent victims to suffering and death!"

"Hear! Hear!"

The three exits at the far end which opened onto the blind alley had filled with listeners, who, gradually pushed forward by the crowd outside, were re-entering the theatre and filling the seats.

Whispers came from the back. "Quiet there! Let's hear what he's saying."

"Will you go on allowing a handful of scoundrels to dispatch millions of peace-loving Europeans to their death on the battlefield? If the situation has got out of hand, it's they who've brought things to this pass. It's never the masses who want war; the war-mongers are always and only the governing-class. The only enemies of the masses are those who exploit them; the people of one country aren't enemies of the people of another. There's not a single German workingman who wants to leave his wife and children and his job, just to shoulder a gun and shoot down French workingmen!"

A ripple of approval sped through the audience. Looking round, Jenny saw that there were two or three hundred of them now, perhaps more, all attention to the speaker.

Jacques's eyes ranged the seething mass, silent yet buzzing like a hornets' nest. Their faces showed as mere blurs of white beyond the footlights, but each face radiated an appeal, conferring on him a terrific importance—unmerited, he knew, yet strangely quickening his hopes, his faith. He had just time to think: "Jenny's listening," before taking a deep breath, a new draught of enthusiasm.

"Are we going to stand by idly, waiting like sheep till they dispatch us to the slaughter-house? Are we to trust the various governments with their fine talk about their desire for peace? Who are the people who've plunged Europe into the hopeless muddle it's in today? Can we be mad enough to hope that these same men—statesmen, premiers, monarchs, and the rest of them—who by their plotting and scheming have brought us to the brink of disaster, will now succeed, by their precious conferences, in preserving peace—-this peace that they've cold-bloodedly imperilled? No! It's too late in the day to expect the governments to preserve the cause of peace. The issue, peace or war, is in the hands of the masses. In our hands and no others!"

Jacques was interrupted by another burst of cheers. He mopped his brow, and for ten seconds stood still, panting like a sprinter getting back his wind. He was conscious of his power; he seemed to feel each of his phrases striking home in his hearers' minds and, like well-aimed shells falling on a powder-magazine, releasing a mass of high-explosive thoughts accumulated there.

With an impatient gesture he imposed silence. " 'What's to be done?' you ask. I say: 'Don't let yourself be "done"!' "

"Hear! Hear!"

"As isolated units, none of us can do anything. But all together, solidly united, there's nothing we can't do. For don't forget this: the life of the country, all the factors vital to the well-being of the nation, depend entirely on the workers. And the masses have an all-powerful weapon, a weapon that's irresistible. And that is … to down tools. A general strike!"

From the back of the room someone cried: "Yes, and play the Fritzes' game, and have 'em on us like a ton o' bricks!"

Jacques straightened up and tried to catch the heckler's eye.

"Not a bit of it! The German workers will join in with us. I've just got back from Berlin and I *know*. I've seen the Unter den Linden demonstrations. I've heard them shouting for peace under the Kaiser's windows. The German worker's every bit as ready as you are to start:a general strike. The one thing that's stopping him just now is fear of Russia. And whose fault is that? Ours and cur rulers': their absurd alliance with the Tsarist government. That's what has made the Germans more afraid than ever of an attack by Russia. Now think! Who is it best can calm the Germans' apprehensions—in other words, call a halt to Russia, warn her off a war? It's you… . Yes, we Frenchmen can do it by refusing to fight. So, by deciding for a strike, we Frenchmen will kill two birds with one stone. Not only will we checkmate the Tsarist war-plans, but we will break down the barriers that prevent the German worker from fraternizing with his French comrade. Yes, that's the road to peace—let Frenchmen and Germans make good their fraternity, and defeat their governments, by launching simultaneously a general strike."

Carried away, his hearers were about to break into applause, but Jacques cut them short. "A strike," he cried, "that's the one form of action which can save us all. Just think what it means! Our leaders issue their appeal, and on the same day, at the same hour, everywhere simultaneously, all the activities of the country come to a standstill. Automatically the strike order empties factories, shops, and government offices. Along the main roads pickets hold up supplies on their way to the city markets. Bread, meat, and milk are rationed by the strike committee. Water, gas, and electricity are cut off. There are no more trains, or buses, or taxis. No more letters or newspapers. No more telegrams or telephone calls. Every cogwheel of the machine has stopped with a jerk. The streets are full of panic-stricken crowds drifting to and fro. But there are no riots, no street-fights. Only silence and consternation. What could the government do against that? What chance would they have of stemming such an onslaught with the police and a few thousand volunteers? How could they collect supplies at such short notice or have them distributed to the population? Why, they couldn't even feed their own policemen and troops! Even the supporters of their nationalist pretensions would turn against them—and there'd be nothing left them but to capitulate. How many days—no, not days—how many hours could they hold out against such a deadlock, a total stoppage of every public utility? And, faced with such a demonstration of the power of the masses, what statesman would ever dare again even to contemplate a war? What government would dare to issue guns and ammunition to a nation in revolt against it?"

Each phrase he uttered was greeted by a wild burst of cheers. As he mastered all his strength to dominate the uproar, Jenny could see his face grow crimson, his jaws quivering, the veins and muscles of his neck standing out like whipcord.

"The hour is critical, but we still have the last word. The weapon in our hands is so tremendous that I don't really think we'd need to use it. The mere threat of a strike—once the government was convinced that the whole working-class without exception was determined to resort to it—would be enough to give a new turn to the policy which has brought us to the brink of the abyss. My friends, you ask: 'What is our duty?' Well, it's simple, and it's clear. We must have one aim only: peace. We must drop party differences and unite. Unite in saying 'No!' and fighting against war. We must rally round the leaders of the International, and bid them spare no pains to organize the general strike, the mass attack of the forces of the proletariat, on which hangs the fate of France, the destiny of Europe."

He stopped abruptly. He felt suddenly empty, voided of his substance.

Jenny could not take her eyes off him. She saw his eyelashes flutter, saw him raise his arm and wave his hand. A wan smile hovered on his face, illuminated by the footlights. Like a drunken man, he swung round clumsily, vanished into the wings.

The crowd gave tongue at last.

"Good for you! Bravo! No war! A general strike! *We—want—peace!*"

The applause continued for several minutes; the audience remained standing in their places, clapping lustily, clamouring for the speaker to come back.

At last, as he showed no sign of returning, there was a general stampede toward the exits.

As for the speaker, he had collapsed in a dark corner of the wings. Huddled on a crate behind a pile of old scenery, dripping with sweat, his blood at fever-point, he had propped his elbows on his knees, pressing his fists to his aching eyes. His one desire was to be left alone as long as possible, for no one to see him in this state of abject collapse.

It was thus that Jenny found him after some minutes' search under Stefany's escort.

He looked up, and suddenly all was well with him again, his face lit with an affectionate smile. She gazed at him intently, without a word.

"The next thing," Stefany counselled, "is to get away from here."

Jacques rose to his feet. The auditorium was empty and in darkness, and the exits had been closed. But a glow-lamp at a corner of the stage showed the way to a passage leading to the stage-door at the back of the theatre. After groping their way past a coal-cellar, they came out into a small backyard cluttered up with planks and scaffolding. It opened onto a seemingly deserted street.

But no sooner were they in the street than a couple of men darted forth from a dark corner. "Police" one of them said gruffly, whipping out a card from his pocket with the deftness of a conjurer and shoving it under Stefany's nose. "Be good enough to show me your identity papers."

Stefany handed the inspector his press card, saying: "I'm a journalist."

The police officer gave it only a cursory glance. It was the speaker who interested him. Fortunately, in the course of the day's peregrinations in Jenny's company, Jacques had looked in at Mourlan's and retrieved his wallet. But he had been unwise enough to keep in his trouser-pocket the passport in the name of a Swiss student which had served for his crossing of the German frontier. "Supposing they search me …!" he thought.

The inspector did not, however, carry inquisition to that point and merely examined Jacques's personal passport under a street-lamp. With an expert glance he compared the passport photograph with the face before him. Then he jotted down some notes in his notebook, moistening his pencil-tip from time to time.

"Where are you living?"

"In Geneva."

"Where are you staying in Paris?"

Jacques hesitated for a moment. He had learned, when visiting Mourlan, that the room in the Rue du Jour where he put up before his trip abroad and which passed for "safe" was no longer available. He had not yet looked round for new quarters, but he had thought of sleeping that night in the lodging-house near the Seine where he had stayed on previous occasions. This was the address that he now gave and the police officer duly recorded.

The inspector turned to Jenny, who was standing beside Jacques. She had nothing with her except some visiting-cards and a letter from Daniel, still in its envelope, which, it so happened, she had left in her bag. The police officer was quite satisfied with these and did not even record her name in his notebook. "Thank you," he said politely, then, touching his cap, walked off, followed by his satellite.

"Society has to protect itself." Stefany grinned ironically.

Jacques, too, smiled. "So I'm a 'marked man' now."

Jenny seized his arm and clung to it, her face convulsed with alarm. "What are they going to do to you?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

"Why—nothing!"

Stefany gave a laugh. "What do you expect them to do to us? We're on the right side of the law."

"There's one thing that worries me," Jacques confessed. "It's having given them my address at Liébaert's place."

"That doesn't matter. You can move somewhere else tomorrow."

The night was sultry; the heat had brought out all the smells of the squalid little street. Worn out by the day's emotions, Jenny clung desperately to Jacques. Suddenly she tripped over a loose paving-block, twisted her ankle, and would have fallen had Jacques not steadied her with his arm. For a moment she halted, leaning against the wall of a warehouse. Her foot was hurting her.

"Oh, Jacques," she sighed, "I'm so dreadfully tired!"

"Lean on me, dear."

Somehow her weariness made her dearer to him than ever.

The narrow street led into a boulevard where noisy knots of people were just beginning to disperse.

"Sit down on this bench, both of you," Stefany said peremptorily. "I've got to hurry on or I'll miss the last train. There's a cab-stand beside the Town Hall; I'll send a taxi for you."

When three minutes later a taxi drew up beside them, Jenny felt suddenly ashamed of her weakness. "It's silly of me. I could quite well have walked as far as the tram." She was vexed with herself for being a drag on Jacques's activities, all the more so as she had always made it a point of honour to fend off attentions on the part of others. Yet, the moment they were in the car, she took off her hat so as to nestle up to him more closely. Warm on her cheek she felt his heaving breast, sonorous with the pulsing tide of life. Without moving her head, she raised her hand and groped for Jacques's face. He smiled—she knew it when her fingers touched his lips. Then, as if she had wanted only to make sure he was really there, she dropped her hand and snuggled up again into his arms.

The car slowed down. "So soon?" she thought, with a stab of regret. Then she recognized her mistake; they were only at the Porte d'Orléans, at the toll-gate.

"Where are you staying tonight?" she whispered.

"Why, at Liébaert's, of course… . Why?"

Words trembled on her lips, died away unspoken. He bent over her. She closed her eyes. For a while Jacques's lips lingered on the fast-shut eyelids. In her ears droned a low cadence of whispered words: "Darling … my dearest … my beloved …" She felt his warm mouth slipping down her cheeks, kissing its way toward her lips—which instinctively shrunk away. He dared not insist and, raising his head, folded his arms still more closely round her in a passionate embrace. And then, of her own will, she proffered her lips to his mouth's kiss. But he did not notice, he had straightened up; gently unlocking his embrace, he reached for the door. She knew then that the car had stopped. Looking out, she saw the familiar doorway… . How long had they been there? she wondered.

Jacques alighted first and helped her out. While he paid the driver, she moved mechanically, like a sleepwalker, toward the door, laid her hand on the bell. Suddenly a mad temptation sped through her mind… . But her mother might be back. And with the thought of *Mme.* de Fontanin, something inside her seemed to snap, and all the old anxieties were back again. Trembling, her fingers groped again for the bell.

When Jacques rejoined her, the door stood ajar and the lights were turned on in the vestibule.

"Tomorrow?" he asked hurriedly.

She nodded. She could not utter a word. He had taken her hand and was fondling it between his palms.

"Not in the morning." His voice came in jerks. "I'll come at two in the afternoon. That suit you?"

Again she nodded, then withdrew her hand and pushed the door open.

He watched her move stiffly across the zone of light and vanish into the dark beyond without once looking back. And then he let the door swing to.

# Chapter V

JACQUES had had a wretched night at Liébaert's. After tossing and turning on the narrow iron bedstead, after wondering time and again if the pale light glimmering on the panes were not a hint of daybreak, he had sunk into a sort of coma that had lasted two hours and left him wearier than ever, aching in every limb. … At last, daylight had come.

After dressing, he packed his few belongings in his valise, making a separate package of his private papers. Then he drew the chair to the window and remained there for some time, his elbows propped on the sill, unable to fix his mind on anything. The picture of Jenny came and went before his eyes, and all his being yearned to have her sitting beside him now, silent, unmoving, cheek to cheek, as in the taxi on the previous night. No sooner was she out of reach than he seemed to have such hosts of things to tell her!

He watched the signs of morning life invade the street and river-bank below; milkmen and scavengers going about their tasks. Garbage-cans still lined the edges of the sidewalk. In a corner house facing him the shutters were still closed, except on the second floor, which was occupied by a china-shop; across the windows he could see masses of miscellaneous crockery half swathed in straw: porcelain vases, sweetmeat jars, misassorted dinner sets, statuettes of dancing-girls, and busts of eminent men. On the ground floor the premises of a Jewish butcher flaunted a gilt shopsign lettered in Hebrew, which held his interest for a desultory moment.

As soon as it had struck seven and he could pay his bill for the night's lodging, he made his escape. The first thing he did was to buy the morning papers and settle down to read them on a bench beside the Seine. There was a trace of coolness in the air; beyond the river white trails of morning mist were floating round Notre-Dame.

Over and over again, with sickening, insatiable avidity, he read the latest dispatches and the comments on them, identical in all the papers like the reflections in a labyrinth of mirrors.

For now at last the entire French press was unanimous in sounding the alarm. Clemenceau's article in *L'Homme Libre* was headed "On the Brink of the Abyss."

Most republican newspapers joined with those of the right in rebuking the French Socialists for having "at such a moment as the present" promoted the organization of an International Peace Congress in Paris.

Jacques felt strangely reluctant to leave the seat beside the river and broach the activities of the new day: Friday, July 31. Yet his perusal of the papers had gradually lifted him out of his lethargy, braced him for contact with the outside world. He had a momentary impulse to hasten forthwith to Jenny, but fought it down. For he was aware that this impulse was due less to his love for Jenny than to a desire to shirk the claims of life; and he blushed for himself. War was not inevitable, all was not yet lost, much could still be done. In every Paris district-at this hour men were awakening, eager to fight the good fight… . And, in any case, he reminded himself, he had warned Jenny that he could not see her before two.

It was much too early to go to the *Humanité* office, but not too early for the *Etendard*. It struck him, too, that he could leave his valise with Mourlan. The prospect of calling on the old printer brought him to his feet. He decided to go to the Bastille on foot, along the river-bank; he was beginning to feel fitter already, and the walk would give him a final lift.

At the *Etendard* premises the door was shut. "I'll come back later," he thought. Meanwhile he might look up Vidal, who kept a bookshop in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The back room of his shop was the meeting-place of the group of intellectuals who edited the *Elan Rouge*, a periodical of anarchist leanings to which Jacques had contributed reviews of Swiss and German books.

Vidal was sitting by the window, in his shirtsleeves, tying up parcels containing pamphlets. He was alone.

"No one turned up yet?" Jacques asked.

"Not a damned one of 'em."

Jacques was struck by the rancour in his voice.

"Why? Is it too early?"

Vidal sniffed. "There weren't many of 'em showed up yesterday, either. Looks as if they wanted to lie low just now… . Ever read that?" he added, pointing to a book several copie6 of which lay on the table.

"Yes." It was Kropotkin's *Spirit of Revolt*.

"Great stuff!" said Vidal.

"Have the police been searching people's houses?" Jacques asked.

"I'm told so. They've not been here; not so far. But everything's set. Let 'em come if they want to… . Sit down."

"No, I can see you're busy. I'll call in again later."

As he stepped out onto the sidewalk a police officer accosted him. "Your identity papers, please."

Jacques noticed three men watching the scene from a distance of some twenty yards—plain-clothes detectives he inferred from their demeanour. The policeman examined his passport and handed it back to him without a word, touching his cap-peak politely.

Lighting a cigarette, Jacques walked leisurely away, but he was feeling uneasy. "That's twice it's happened within twenty-four hours," he muttered to himself. "Really, we might be under martial law!" He took some steps down a side-street to see if he was being followed. "No, they haven't done me that honour."

It struck him that while he was in these parts he might drop in at the Modern Bar in the Rue Traversière, the headquarters of a particularly active Socialist group, that of the Third *Arrondissement*. The treasurer of the group, one Bonfils, was an old schoolmate of Périnet's.

"Bonfils?" the barman replied. "I ain't set eyes on him the last three days. As a matter of fact, no one's been round this morning, either."

Just then a man of about thirty, with a saw slung across his back, entered the café, wheeling his bicycle.

"Morning, Ernest. Bonfils around?"

"No."

"Any of the men?"

"Nary a one."

"Ah! Any news?"

"No."

"You're still waiting for orders from the Committee, eh?"

"Yes."

The carpenter fell silent and gloomed perplexedly around the café, opening and shutting his mouth like a fish out of water as he flicked the cigarette dangling from his mouth from one lip to the other.

"It's mighty awkward," he said at last. "They hadn't ought to leave us in the dark like that. I got a mobilization order calling me up on the first day, and I ain't got a notion what I ought to do. What do you think about it, Ernest? Ought we to join up?"

"No!" Jacques cried.

"I can't advise you," Ernest said gloomily. "You got to decide that for yourself, my boy."

"It's playing the game of the men who started the war, if you let them rope you in," Jacques said.

The carpenter made as if he had not heard the remark and turned to the barman. "Yes, you're right; I must decide that for myself." Though he spoke in a confident tone, the man's perplexity was obvious and he shot a surly glance at Jacques, as if to say: "I don't want advice from you, young fellow. I want orders from the Committee."

He turned his cycle round, saying: "So long, men," and slowly walked out.

"I'm getting damn well fed up with 'em," the barman grumbled, "all these fellows asking me the same thing. What the hell can I do about it? Seems that the Committee can't settle among themselves what orders to give. But what's the good of a committee, I'd like to know, if they can't give a lead?"

Before retracing his steps to the *Etendard*, Jacques spent some pensive minutes roaming the neighbouring by-streets, to which their daylong animation was steadily returning. Files of pushcarts piled with fruit and vegetables had drawn up along the curb. What with pedlars crying their wares and the busy throng of workers and housewives all keeping to the shady side and jostling one another on the narrow sidewalks, these streets had the cheerful din and bustle of an open-air market.

He noticed that men's underwear bulked large in the dry-goods windows and the garments displayed were singularly out of keeping with the season: heavy flannel shirts, knitted vests, woollen socks, and the like. The shoe-shops flaunted notices hastily blocked out on cards or strips of cloth. Some—the more discreet—merely advertised "Hunting Boots" or "Stout Walking Shoes"; others, more enterprising, offered "Hobnailed Shoes" or, yet more frankly, "Army Shoes." A good many men stopped to inspect them, but did not buy. Women with shopping-bags hung on their arms pawed and prodded the woollen garments, picked up the heavy boots and carefully appraised them "on the off-chance… ." No one was buying so far, but the interest shown by the public in these window displays spoke for the universal preoccupation.

The growing scarcity of silver currency was beginning to hamper trade. Pedlars, turned money-changers for the nonce, were moving to and fro, rattling the money-boxes slung round their waists. For a hundred-franc note they gave ninety-five francs in coin; the police seemed to shut their eyes to this illicit exchange.

On the previous day the Bank of France had made an extensive issue of five-franc and twenty-franc banknotes; these were being shown round as curiosities. "You see! They had it all ready in advance," someone observed; the tone conveyed mistrust and rancour, tempered with a certain admiration.

Jacques, who had had nothing to eat since the previous day, was beginning to feel exhausted. He seated himself at a table on the terrace of a café in the Place de la Bastille.

From the Gare de Lyon, from the tramway terminus and the subway station, floods of workers, come in from the suburbs, were streaming past. Most of them halted for a moment in the sunlit square, newspaper in hand, and cast an anxious look around as if to make sure, before going on to their work, that the imminence of war had not changed Paris overnight.

The café was crowded with people exchanging remarks at the top of their voices. One man told how he had sent his wife to the Town Hall to check up on certain entries in his service-book, and seemed gratified at being able to declare that the personnel in the military information bureau had had to be tripled to cope with the rush of inquiries. Grinning, a taxi-driver displayed a magazine with pictures on the same page of the Kaiser's return to Berlin and Poincaré's to Paris; side by side, significantly parallel, the pictures showed the two great men standing on the running-boards of their respective cars and acknowledging with the same martial gesture the acclamations of their trustful peoples.

A middle-aged couple went up to the counter. With a scared expression the woman scanned the faces of the people drinking at it, as if pleading for a kindly, reassuring glance. Suddenly they began speaking. The man said: "We come from Fontainebleau. Things are going hot and strong down there."

More loquacious, the woman launched into details. "Yesterday . evening a fellow came and told the officer who has a room on the same floor as us—he's in the 7th Dragoons—to pack up his kit right away. Later on, in the middle of the night, we were woke up by the noise of horses. The cavalry were moving out."

"Where to?" asked the girl at the cash-desk.

"No one knows. We went onto our balcony. All the folk in town were watching at their windows, but you didn't hear a cheer, not a word spoken. They rode by quiet as mice, in their field uniforms. Without the band. After them came the transport wagons with the kit and so on. They never stopped passing, not till it was daylight."

"At the Town Hall," the man put in, "they've posted notices requisitioning horses, mules, carriages—even fodder."

"Looks mighty like trouble brewing!" said the cashier with an interested, almost gratified air.

"The territorial reserves have been called up already," someone remarked.

"What? The old fellows? Tell us another!"

"It's gospel truth," said the waiter, stopping on his way to a customer. "Seems they need troops right away to guard the bridges and junctions—all the vital points, as they call 'em. Listen! My brother, who's turned forty-three and lives near Chalons, was told to report at the station. Seems they rigged him out with an old képi, and a rifle, and a coupla cartridge-pouches slung on his chest, and, 'Off you go!' they says. 'You're on for sentry duty at the viaduct.' And it's no laughing matter, let me tell you. Nobody can get near a bridge without a permit. The orders are to shoot on sight. They say there's spies all over the place."

"I've orders to report on the second day." The speaker was a house-painter in white overalls. No one had questioned him and when he spoke he did not raise his eyes from the liqueur-glass he was twirling between his fingers.

Another voice: "So've I."

"And yours truly on the third day!" cried a fat, jovial-looking plumber. "But I'm stationed at Angoulême. And before the squareheads get that far into France …!" With a mighty heave he slung across his shoulder the tool-bag jangling at his side, chuckling to himself. "And, anyhow, who cares a hoot one way or the other? Let 'em all come! There's worse things than a spot of active service."

"Duty's duty," the girl at the cash-desk sagely summed it up.

Inwardly raging, Jacques clenched his fists and scanned the faces round him. He could not believe his eyes: not a trace was there of any violent reaction, not the least glimmer of revolt. It seemed as if the turn of events had come as such a surprise to all these people that their main feeling was one of stupefaction, of having lost their bearings. Under the bravado may have been dismay, but all were resigned, or almost so.

He rose, picked up his valise, and left in haste, more than ever eager to get in touch again with Mourlan.

He found the old printer, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his black overalls, stumping up and down the three rooms of his ground floor, the communicating doors of which stood open. He was alone. Without halting, Mourlan bawled: "Come in!" and did not turn till his visitor had closed the door.

"Ah, it's you, boy!"

"Good morning. Would you mind keeping this for me?" Jacques said, holding up his valise. "There're only some clothes in it, unmarked. No papers or name."

Mourlan nodded curtly, glaring at Jacques with harsh, resentful eyes. "Why the hell are you staying on here?" he flung out.

Jacques stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Don't you realize we're in for it this time, you fathead?" Mourlan continued. "And the sooner you show a clean pair of heels, the better."

"And it's you of all people, you, Mourlan, who give me that advice?"

"Yes, it's me!" he growled. "Who else should it be?" He brushed off some crumbs caught in his beard, thrust his hands again into his pockets, and resumed his angry pacing to and fro.

Never had Jacques seen him so upset, his gaze so forlorn. There was nothing for it but to wait till this black mood had passed. Without being asked, he drew up a chair and sat down.

After striding up and down the three rooms like a caged beast for a few minutes more, Mourlan came to a stop in front of Jacques. "Who are you counting on today, I'd like to know? On your famous 'proletariat'? On a general strike?"

"Yes." Jacques's tone was resolute.

The shoulders of the old evangelist of revolution heaved disdainfully. "A general strike! What bunk! Who talks of it today? Who dares even to think of it?"

"I do."

"What? Can't you see that even in the herd of poor damned fools we're trying to save despite themselves there's an unbelievable majority of hotheads, fellows who're always out for a scrap and get all worked up at the least provocation? You've only got to tell them a couple of Germans have crossed the frontier and those fellows will be fairly howling for their rifles. Take any one of 'em apart and talk to him and you'll generally find he's a decent sort of fellow who says he doesn't wish anyone harm and believes he means it. But look beneath the surface and you'll find there's a mighty lot of the caveman lingering on—instincts he's not proud of and keeps mum about—only he just can't help himself. They're always plaguing him and, when a chance crops up, he has to give 'em their run. Human nature's built that way, and there's nothing to be done about it. So who the hell can you count on, if you can't count on the men themselves? The leaders of the European proletariat, or our charming friends the Socialist deputies? Just see how they're behaving now! Backing Poincaré every damned time! He's only got to ask for it and they'll sign his precious declaration of war, blindfold!"

He turned on his heel and began striding up and down again.

"No, no," Jacques muttered. "We've men like Jaurés with us. And abroad they've men of the stamp of Vandervelde and Haase."

"Oh, so you're counting on our grand panjandrums, are you?" Mourlan said, bearing down on him from the far end of the room. "But you saw with your own eyes how they carried on at Brussels. Do you think that, if those fellows had been genuinely prepared to defend the cause of peace by revolutionary acts, they wouldn't have managed to come to some agreement and given a definite line to the Socialists of Europe? No, they got their rounds of applause by slinging mud at their governments. And what did they do next? They dashed over to the postoflice and sent off imploring telegrams to the Kaiser and the Tsar, to Poincaré and the President of the United States and—did you ever hear the like?—to the Pope, asking him to threaten Franz Josef with hell fire! What's your friend Jaurés doing about it now? He trots round every morning, like a well-trained little lapdog, to pluck Viviani by the sleeve and beg his 'dear friend' to 'bring pressure to bear on Russia.' No, the workers have been let down by their leaders. Instead of giving a strong lead to the revolutionary movement against the forces out for war, they've let the nationalists have it all their own damned way, they've lost the chance of launching a revolution, they've let capitalism trample on the proletariat."

He took a few strides across the room, then suddenly swung round on Jacques. "And, anyhow, no one will ever get the idea out of my head that your pal Jaurés isn't just playing to the gallery. In his heart he knows as well as I do that the game is up, that tomorrow Russia and Germany will join in the dance, and that Poincaré will deliberately let us be dragged in too. Because, for one thing, he intends to fulfill the scandalous pledges he gave at St. Petersburg, and because …" He broke off, went to the door, and gently opened it to let in a grey cat followed by her kittens. "Come in, pussy! Come in! … And because he's itching to play the hero and win back Alsace and Lorraine for France."

He had gone up to the set of shelves stacked with books and pamphlets which occupied the space between the windows. Taking out a book, he gave it some gentle slaps, like a fancier patting a horse's neck. "See here, my boy," he went on in a calmer tone as he put the book back in its place. "I don't want to blow my own horn, but I wasn't far wrong when, after their Basel Congress, I wrote that book to prove to them that their famous 'International' was based on a misconception. Jaurés told me off for it. So did all the

others. But today there's no getting away from the facts. It was folly to hope to reconcile Socialist internationalism—ours, the real thing—with the nationalist governments that still have all the power, everywhere. To hope to put up a fight, to hope to win, by law-abiding methods only, by merely 'bringing pressure to bear' on governments and limiting our tactics to fine speeches in Parliament, was sheer blithering idiocy. Nine out of ten of our famous revolutionary leaders—shall I tell you what I really think about them? They'll never be able to bring themselves to adopt 'unconstitutional' methods. That being so, well, the conclusion's inescapable. As they've never had the wits, or indeed the will, to overthrow the Constitution and set up a Socialist regime, the only thing that's left to them today is to defend it at the point of the bayonet, once the first German soldier shows up on the frontier. And that's just what they're preparing to do, behind the scenes… . God! To think I've lived to see this day!" he burst out, and, turning on his heel again, took a few angry strides toward the other end of the room. "You'll see: they'll all turn their coats, every man jack of 'em—like Gustave Hervê. You've read the papers, haven't you? 'A call to arms.' 'Your country needs you.' 'We will not sheathe the sword… .' Etcetera. Whanging the patriotic drum… . Forward, the boobs' brigade! In a week's time, there won't be left in France—perhaps not in Europe—a dozen Socialists the genuine article. Only the turncoats, Socialists-in-uniform!"

Again Mourlan swept down on Jacques, and now he laid a hand, trembling with emotion, on Jacques's shoulder. "That's why I'm telling you, boy, take old Mourlan's tip and—clear out! Don't hang about here. Get back to Switzerland. Maybe there's still something for fellows like you to do in Switzerland. But here we're licked—down and out!"

Jacques parted with Mourlan in a mood of despondency that, try as he would, he could not shake off. In quest of consolation, he hurried to the *Humanité* office.

But Stefany and Gallot were in conference with the Skipper. Cadieux, hurrying from one office to another, shouted to him as he dashed past that Jaurés had just had an interview with two members of the government, Malvy and Abel Ferry, and returned with the news that there were still good grounds for hope.

No sooner had Jacques left him than he ran into young Pagès, Gallot's second-in-command, who took a very pessimistic view. Military preparations were, it seemed, being speeded up in Russia; the rumour that the Tsar had secretly signed on the previous day the ukase for general mobilization was being confirmed on every hand.

At the Croissant, where Jacques looked in for a moment only, he saw no one he knew except Old Mother Ury, who seemed to be acting as chairwoman at a feminist gathering taking place in a corner of the café. Hatless, perched uneasily on the leatherette-upholstered wall-sofa, which was much too high for her stumpy legs, she was holding forth, surrounded by a group of female militants roped in, presumably, to hear her latest gospel. Round the fanatical old face fluttered an aureole of wispy grey hair. Jacques made as if he had not seen her, and left immediately.

At the Progrès in the Rue du Sentier several people had collected already in the ground-floor room. Across a haze of tobacco-smoke Jacques recognized the faces of Rabbe, Jumelin, Berthet, and a newcomer from Nancy, the secretary of the Meurthe-et-Moselle Trade Union Federation, who had reached Paris that morning, bringing the latest news from Eastern France.

A German Socialist with whom he had travelled up had assured him that a council of war had been held the previous evening in Berlin. It had been decided to convene the Federal Council. The opinion was that "very grave decisions" would be reached in the course of the day. Bridges on the Moselle were occupied by German troops. Any incident might start a conflagration. Already on the previous day a troop of German light cavalry had—by way, it almost seemed, of wanton provocation—crossed the frontier near Lunéville and galloped over several hundred yards of French territory.

"At Luneville, you say?" Jacques's thoughts swerved abruptly to Daniel—to Jenny.

Thereafter he listened with only half an ear. The man from Nancy was telling how during the past few nights people had seen passing on all the eastern railway-lines endless trains of empty cars on their way to reserve depots in the vicinity of Paris.

Sick at heart, Jacques held his peace; a starkly realistic vision of Europe slipping downhill toward the abyss held his mind. At this stage nothing short of a miracle could bring about a salutary reversal of opinion and brace the peoples' will to swift, unanimous resistance.

Suddenly a desire to see his brother again came over him. They had not met during the whole of the week. It was lunchtime; Antoine was sure to be at home. And, Jacques told himself, this interlude would while away the time till his appointment with Jenny.

# Chapter VI

HAVE you heard, sir, there's going to be a war?" Léon asked. Impossible to say if he was laughing up his sleeve; the tone was mildly interrogative, as was the expression of the man's goggle eyes, but there was a hint of slyness in the set of his under-lip. Without waiting for a reply, he added: "I'm called up for the fourth day. But I've always been an orderly."

They heard the clang of the elevator-door on the landing outside.

"The doctor's come, sir," Léon said, going to open the door.

Antoine shepherded into the flat a little, bespectacled, grey-haired man in an alpaca coat, whom Jacques recognized as M. Chasle, sometime his father's secretary.

M. Chasle gave a start on seeing Jacques. Whenever he met anyone he knew, he brought his hand up to his mouth, as if to stifle an exclamation of astonishment. "Ah, so it's you?"

Antoine shook his brother's hand absent-mindedly, evincing no surprise at finding him there. "M. Chasle was waiting for me in the street. I've persuaded him to come to lunch with us."

"Just for once in a way," demurely chirped the little man.

After telling Léon to serve lunch, Antoine took M. Chasle and Jacques to his consulting-room, where Studler, Roy, and Jousselin were awaiting him. Chairs and tables were strewn with newspapers.

"I'm a bit late," Antoine said, "as I had to call at the Foreign Office on my way back from the hospital."

A silence followed; all eyes were gloomily intent on Antoine.

"Well?" Studler said at last.

"Things look bad," Antoine said laconically. "Damned bad, in fact." An expression of gloom settled on his face. Then, more briskly: "Well, let's have some lunch."

The meal began in absolute silence, as if the process of eating the first course—boiled eggs—called for their utmost concentration.

Suddenly Antoine spoke, without looking up from his plate. "From what Rumelles tells me, we've good reason to hope that England's coming in with us. Anyhow, not against us."

"In that case," Studler asked, "why doesn't England buck up and say so? That might save the situation yet."

Jacques's indignation got the better of him. "Obviously because it's far from certain that England wants to 'save the situation.' She's the only country that really stands to win something in the mad gamble of a world war."

"You're quite mistaken," Antoine put in fretfully. "I hear that none of the British statesmen want a war."

M. Chasle, sitting bolt-upright on the edge of the chair next to Antoine's, was all ears. Wherever he sat he gave the impression of being perched on an office-stool. He perked his head right and left, gazing at each speaker with such agonized attention that he forgot. to eat. These world-wide alarums and excursions passed his understanding, and had wrecked his nerves. What with reading the newspapers and listening to what was said around him, he had succumbed two days previously to a mood of blind panic, and now, at his wit's end, he had come to Antoine for reassurance.

"The British Cabinet"—Antoine's tone, for all its self-assurance, somehow rang false—"is composed of genuinely peace-loving men. And I'm given to understand it's a picked team, the best in Europe. The Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, is particularly levelheaded; Asquith and Churchill combine honesty with shrewdness, while Haldane's extremely energetic and knows Europe inside out. Lloyd George's pacifist views are common knowledge; he's always been against extensive armaments."

"Yes, they're picked men," M. Chasle agreed in the tone of one announcing a deeply rooted conviction.

Jacques, on the defensive, gazed at his brother but did not speak.

"With such men in power, there's no fear of England's acting with undue precipitancy," Antoine concluded.

Studler spoke again. "In that case, why has Grey been wasting the last ten days trying to patch things up by diplomatic hocus-pocus when the one certain way of making the Central Powers draw in their horns was to warn them they'd have England against them if war broke out?"

"And that's just what he did, so I'm told, at his interview yesterday with the German Ambassador."

"Well, what came of it?"

"Nothing's come-—so far. As a matter of fact, our Foreign Office fears this warning came too late to take effect."

"Naturally!" Studler grunted. "Why the devil did he wait so long?"

"On purpose, likely as not," Jacques suggested. "Of all the crafty politicians who hold the reins of power in Europe, Sir Edward is, to my mind the most …"

"That's by no means what Rumelles says," Antoine cut in testily. "Rumelles was an attache at our London embassy for three years and often came in contact with Sir Edward. So he knows what he's talking about. And I must say his estimate of the man carries conviction."

"That's what makes the charm of it," M. Chasle muttered inanely, as if speaking to himself.

Antoine fell silent. He had no wish to join in a discussion or even to repeat what he had heard at the Quai d'Orsay. He was tired out. He had spent most of the previous night docketing, with Studler's help, his files of medical observations; he was determined, come what might, to leave his records in good order. After the Caliph had left he had gone up to his study, burned old letters, and sorted out his private papers. He had snatched two hours' sleep as dawn was breaking. No sooner was he awake than the news in the papers had aroused in him a state of febrile unrest which the pessimistic outlook of all whom he had spoken to in the course of the morning and the general atmosphere of consternation had intensified hour by hour. Moreover, his morning work at the hospital had been particularly heavy and, when he left, he had felt completely exhausted. That depressing colloquy with Rumelles had been the last straw. His morale, till now intact, was badly shaken. The tempest breaking over Europe was rocking the very foundations on which he had built his life: science and human reason. He was suddenly discovering the impotence of intellect; and, confronted with this uprush from the world of instinct, the futility of the virtues which had been the mainstay of his industrious career: common sense,

moderation, wisdom and experience, the cult of justice. He would have preferred to be alone, with leisure to think things out, to fight down his depression and collect his strength, in stoic preparation for the ineluctable. But everyone was looking at him, waiting, it seemed, for him to speak. He frowned and, summoning up all his energy, went on.

"This fellow Grey, I gather, is the conscientious type of Englishman, always a bit mistrustful and slow to act, and not particularly expansive, but wholly dependable in word and deed. Quite the opposite of what you think," he added, turning to his brother.

"I judge him by his foreign policy," Jacques said.

"Rumelles has an excellent explanation for that. But it's complicated and I doubt if I can remember all he told me." Antoine gave a sigh and passed his hand across his forehead. "For one thing, as to fixing up a definite alliance with France, Grey hasn't a free hand. There are several members of the Cabinet with pro-German leanings; Haldane, for instance. And, as for the British nation, everyone was far more concerned—until the last few days—with the Irish imbroglio, than with the consequences of the Sarajevo murder. The nation would have refused point-blank to let itself be dragged into a Continental war for the defence of Servia. So, even if Grey had felt inclined to pledge his country's aid more explicitly and at an earlier date, he ran the risk of being repudiated by his colleagues, by Parliament, and by the nation at large."

He helped himself to a glass of wine—a thing he rarely did at luncheon—and drank it off. "That's not all," he continued. "As always, there's a psychological aspect of the problem as well. It seems probable that Grey, from the start, fully realized that the issue—peace or war—lay with the English. But he also realized that the weapon in his hands was a double-edged one. Supposing that a week ago the British government had pledged itself publicly to come to the aid of France and Russia …"

"… we'd have found Berlin singing another tune," Studler interjected; "Germany'd have backed down, told Austria to draw in her claws, and everything'd have been settled amicably, after a few days' haggling between the various governments."

"Possibly; but it's far from certain. In fact, it seems Grey had good reasons for fearing just the opposite result. If Russia had felt sure she could count not only on our army and our financial aid, but on the British fleet and British money too, the temptation to risk a war, with such trump cards in her hand, might well have proved irresistible." Antoine cast a glance at Jacques. "Seen from that angle, Grey's attitude takes on a very different aspect. We may well believe that his policy of blowing hot and cold may have been prompted by a genuine desire to preserve peace. He said to France: 'Go slow! Bring pressure to bear on Russia; she may drag you into a war in which, I tell you plainly, you can't reckon on our help.' And at the same time he was saying to Germany: 'Take care! We don't approve of your truculence. Don't forget our fleet is mobilized in the North Sea, and we've made no undertaking to remain neutral.' "

Studler shrugged his shoulders. "With all his high principles, your dear friend Grey seems to have been playing a very childish game. For Russia must have known, through her secret service agents, the threats that London was making to Berlin. And inevitably that encouraged her to hope that England would come in against Germany. And meanwhile the German secret service was reporting to Berlin that England had given France and Russia little encouragement to count on British support. Which meant that Germany had no reason to take overseriously the warning given her by England. Yes, that policy of 'blowing hot and cold' seems to have actually promoted the likelihood of a war."

As a matter of fact, Rumelles had expressed practically the same opinions. But Antoine did not mention this. He drew a clean-cut line between the news of a general order which he felt justified in passing on to others and such comments and remarks of his statesman friend as seemed of a confidential nature let fall in the course of conversation. And Jacques's presence tended to make him still more circumspect than usual. So he resolved not to mention that the French authorities were beginning to wonder if the time were not ripe for making a frank and urgent appeal for British support—in the form, for instance, of a personal letter from the President of the Republic to King George.

Likewise he refrained from speaking of an incident which had, according to Rumelles, at long last induced Sir Edward Grey definitely to inform the German Ambassador at their interview on the previous day that Britain would throw her weight into the scales. The Germans, it appeared, had committed a serious blunder on the twenty-ninth by making proposals to the British Foreign Office to this effect: "If you will give us a guarantee of your neutrality, we undertake, after our victory, to seek no territorial aggrandizement at the expense of Continental France; we will merely annex her colonies." This outrageous proposal, coupled with the German refusal to undertake to respect the neutrality of Belgium in the event of war, had (so Rumelles said) not only aroused the ire of the Foreign Office but had effectively converted all the members of the Cabinet to a Francophile frame of mind and led the British government to declare itself unequivocally on the Franco-Russian side.

Jacques had heard out Antoine without contradicting him, but he did not yield. "All very well," he said. "But Rumelles seems too much inclined to forget the real issues of the problem."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that ten years ago Great Britain was still the unchallenged mistress of the seas, and that, if she doesn't find some way of checking at all costs the growth of the German fleet, she may find herself one of these days playing second fiddle to Germany. That's a positive fact which everybody knows, and which I can't help thinking throws much more light on the situation than all Rumelles's theories about Grey's 'psychology,' his shillyshallying and scruples."

Studler nodded approval. "And one wonders how far that business of the Baghdad Railway has influenced British policy. It means that Germany's got hold of the line linking up Constantinople with the Persian Gulf—the railway that leads straight to India and may compete disastrously with the Suez Canal."

"And what exactly does all that prove?" Roy asked with seeming casualness.

"What, indeed?" echoed M. Chasle.

"It proves," Jacques said, "that England has very strong reasons for wanting a war that will cripple Germany. To my mind, that explains everything."

"Those English had a bit of trouble one fine day with Bonaparte, didn't they?" said M. Chasle with a knowing air. And he added with a quiet chuckle: "But of course there'll never be a 'stratagem' like Napoleon on the German side. What?"

During the pause that followed, glints of discreetly veiled amusement twinkled in all eyes but M. Chasle's.

Then Jousselin turned to Jacques. "All the same, don't you think we can trust the English statesmen when they say they're out for peace?"

"No, I don't. The Kaiser's famous remark about Germany's future being 'on the water' was a definite challenge to England, and, in my opinion, England is taking up the challenge at this moment. She's grasping at the chance of crushing the one European nation that stands in her way. I believe that Grey was well aware of Russia's intentions and had no illusions as to the futility of his repeated offers of mediation. I believe he has been consistently throwing dust in our eyes, and that in actual fact the British government has come to look on everything that makes this war inevitable as so much to the good. For it's a war that England *needs*, though she has never yet dared, and perhaps would never have dared, left to herself, to start it."

He looked toward his brother. Antoine was peeling an apple and seemed determined to stay out of the discussion.

"Already, in 1911," Studler remarked, fixing his eyes on Roy, "England did everything she could—without showing her hand too openly—to embroil France with Germany over Morocco. But for Caillaux …"

Jacques, too, had turned toward Roy, who was sitting at the far end of the big dining-table. At the mention of Caillaux, he had looked up abruptly and Jacques caught a sudden flash of the keen young teeth.

Just then Jousselin, who for some minutes had seemed lost in musings, began speaking. A little pile of green almonds lay on his plate; he had been shelling them methodically, impaling them one by one on his fork and neatly paring off the husks with his knife. Now laying down knife and fork, he sent his mild gaze roaming around the table.

"Do you know how I think historians of the years to come will describe the phase of history through which we're passing? They'll say: 'One summer day in July 1914, suddenly a conflagration broke out in the heart of Europe. It started in Austria where the incendiaries had prepared the ground with skill and foresight.' "

"But," Studler interrupted, "the spark that set it ablaze came from Servia—driven by a treacherous northeast wind blowing straight from St. Petersburg."

"And the Russians," Jousselin continued, "promptly fanned the fire."

"With France inexplicably approving them," Jacques added. "And, acting in concert, they flung onto the fire nice little bundles of dry faggots that they'd stored up years before, for the occasion."

"What about Germany?" Jousselin asked. As all were silent, he continued. "Germany, meanwhile, stood pat, watching the flames roar up, sparks flying in all directions… . Why? Out of cunning?"

"Undoubtedly!" cried Studler.

"No," Jacques put in. "Out of stupidity, perhaps, and pride. Because she was mad enough to believe that, whenever she thought fit, she could stop the spread of the conflagration, call off disaster."

"And rake some nice roast chestnuts out of the fire," Roy added.

"Such things," M. Chasle murmured dolefully, "shouldn't be allowed."

"We've not dealt with England yet!" Jousselin reminded them.

"Oh, England!" Jacques exclaimed. "Her part strikes me as very obvious. From the start she had ample supplies of water, quite enough to put the fire out. And—what makes her conduct blacker—she clearly saw the fire catch, and spreading. But she contented herself with shouting: 'Fire! Fire!' and took good care not to open her sluicegates. A fact which, for all the pacifist airs and graces she affects, will go heavily against her at the bar of posterity. She'll surely be adjudged an aider and abettor of the incendiaries."

Bending above his plate, Antoine did not seem to be listening.

The Caliph rolled his large, liquid eyes on Jacques. "There's one point on which I can't agree with you, and that's the German attitude today." His voice had suddenly assumed a brittle, nervous quality as though he failed to master some secret discomposure. "I believe Germany wants a war."

"Why, of course!" Roy exclaimed. "Germany's taken over, lock, stock, and barrel, the ambitions of Charles V, the programme of Napoleon. The Seven Years' War, Sadowa, the campaign of 1870, were stepping-stones on the way to German supremacy in Europe. And every spell of peace was used by Germany for piling up armaments so as to realize the sooner her dream of dominating Europe."

Studler, who had heard out Roy's tirade with lowered eyes, turned again to Jacques. "Yes, I'm certain Germany is deliberately following up a well-thought-out plan. From the outset hers was the 'hidden hand' that pulled the strings and directed every move of Austria's."

Jacques made as if to speak, but the Caliph, who seemed the prey of an unwonted agitation, gave him no time, and almost shouted: "Just think! It stares you in the eye! Would Austria, old ramshackle Austria, left to herself, ever have dared to adopt such a tone, to bluff and bully? Would she have dared to defy all the great powers by refusing reasonable time for the Servian reply? Or to reject so conciliatory a reply without a vestige of deliberation? Why, it's absurd! If you assume Germany had no warlike intent at the back of her mind, how do you account for her systematic hostility to every proposal—sincere or not—anyhow, diplomatically acceptable—made by England? Or her refusal to refer the issue to the Hague Tribunal, as the Tsar suggested?"

"Still," Jacques put in, "Germany's conduct can be justified to a large extent. She was well aware of the warlike intentions of Russian Pan-Slavism. And she maintained throughout that for this reason any meddling by the powers in the Austro-Servian dispute involved more risks than if they elected to stand out."

Antoine dissented vigorously. "At the Quai d'Orsay they've never trusted Germany's pacific declarations. They've long since taken it for a moral certainty …"

"A moral certainty!" Jacques echoed scornfully.

"… that the Central Powers have made their minds up to turn down anything that might prevent or even postpone a war."

All this political table-talk was getting on Antoine's nerves; to end it, he put down his napkin and rose.

His guests followed suit.

"Let's not forget," Jacques said to Studler as they slowly filed out of the dining-room, "that Germany made several conciliatory moves, and the French and Russian governments would not even entertain them."

"Mere eyewash, those conciliatory moves! After all, Germany couldn't afford to disdain European opinion altogether."

"Still, in fairness," Jousselin pointed out, "you must admit that Germany's proposals—urging the necessity of a punitive expedition against Servia and strict localization of the conflict—by no means indicated any desire to start a European war. And still less a war against us."

"Not to mention," Jacques added, "that if Germany'd really had that desire for war and for crushing France, why should she have waited so long? During the last fifteen years she had any number of opportunities, far more favourable than the present one—why did she let them all slip past? Why didn't she take advantage of the Franco-British tension over the Fashoda incident in 1898? Or the Russo-Japanese war in 1905? Or the Bosnian annexations in 1908? Or the Agadir incident in 1911?"

"All that's neither here nor there!" the Caliph declared obstinately, thrusting his hands into his pockets. "Neither here nor there, I tell you!"

In the doorway, M. Chasle was nibbling a slice of bread, hopping aside as each of the others left the room. To Antoine he showed the piece of bread, with a twinkle in his eye. "That was one of my old dad's crotchets; with his dessert he had to have his little snack of bread. I take after him, M. Antoine. It's my *bonne bouche*, as they say." His smile, which seemed to deprecate such childish self-indulgence, conveyed also a hint of pride in so singular a propensity. M. Chasle was much too natural to be modest.

As Jacques and Jousselin were entering the consulting-room, where coffee awaited them, Studler slipped between them, gripped their arms, then burst out again, but in a confidential, tremulous tone:

" 'Neither here nor there,' I said, because one can go on arguing till the crack of doom, and finding a reason for everything. Neither here nor there, because we all *must* believe that Germany's guilty and we've been bluffed. Personally, each time I pick up a paper these days, the thing I look for first—I'm only too well aware of it—is some further proof of German double-dealing."

"But why?" Jousselin asked, coming to a stop just inside the door.

The Caliph looked down. "So as to be able to face what's coming to us all. Because if we began to question the guilt of Germany, it would be too hard to do what they call 'our duty.' "

Jacques could not repress a wry smile. "Our duty as good patriots?"

"Yes," Studler said.

"And you can still take it seriously, this duty that they rant about—even when you see all that they're putting over on us in its name?"

The Caliph shook his shoulders furiously as though trying to extricate them from the meshes of a net. "Oh, damn it!" He sounded at once irate and plaintive. "Don't make things harder for me. We all know that if the worst came to the worst and France were to go to war tomorrow, we wouldn't shirk our duty, whatever our private opinions were."

Jacques's mouth opened. He was on the point of crying: "*I* would!" when he noticed his brother gazing fixedly at him from the middle of the room. The cry froze on his lips; the strangely imploring look he read in Antoine's eyes arrested his impulse to speak out. Ever since Antoine's arrival, Jacques had been painfully conscious that, under the surface, Antoine's nerves were frayed to the breaking-point. And he was as profoundly moved as he had been at the bedside of his dying father when he had seen his elder brother, whom he had thought so imperturbable, break down, sobbing like a child.

Antoine looked away. "Manuel, old boy," he said, "will you pour out our coffee, please?"

"What's more," the Caliph went on with ever-increasing vehemence, "I say to myself: 'Who can tell? A European war on the grand scale would very likely do more to bring about the triumph of socialism than twenty years of peacetime propaganda.' "

"There," Jousselin replied, "I really cannot follow you. I know that some of your theorists assert that a war is needed to usher in the revolution. But I've always regarded that view as—to use the understatement old Philip is so fond of—'one way of looking at it.' Those who hold it can have no idea of what a nation under arms, the mobilization of a whole people, means today. What a curious kink they must have in their minds to imagine that a movement of revolt which hasn't yet been able to make good under our easy-going democratic system should suddenly become feasible when all the revolutionaries have been clapped into uniform and are at the mercy of a military clique with powers of life and death over every one of them!"

His eyes riveted on Jacques, Studler had not heard a word. "A war," he muttered. "What exactly would it mean? Three or four hellish months, I suppose… . But after that why shouldn't the working-classes of the nations come out of their ordeal proved by the fire, welded into a stabler union? And supposing it really meant an end of imperialism and armament races, and at last the peoples of the earth settled down to an enduring peace, based on the International?"

Jacques shook his head, unconvinced. "No, I've no use for that hypothetical Utopia you speak of, if it's to cost a war. Anything's better than having to see justice and reason demolished by brute force and butchery. Anything rather than the madness, the horrors of a war!"

Roy, who had been listening, put in a remark. "*Anything*, you say? Do you include the occupation of France by a hostile army? In that case, why not immediately offer the Germans the Meuse district and the Ardennes, for the sake of peace? Why not give them the North of France and control of the Straits of Dover while you're about it? They'd welcome another outlet on the sea."

Jacques's shoulders lifted slightly. "The big business interests in the North would suffer, I admit. But do you really think that the greater part of the workers and miners would find their lot substantially worse than it is now? Or that, if their opinion were taken, most of them wouldn't prefer even that to dying gloriously on the battlefield?" His eyes were glowing with serene courage. "I know your theory that war and peace must alternate in the life of nations, like the movement of a pendulum. A monstrous theory! We've got to stop that pendulum for good and all. Humanity must somehow be got out of this fatal rhythm and be allowed to devote its energies to building up a better social order. War doesn't solve a single one of man's vital problems. It only makes the worker's plight worse than before. During a war he's mere cannon fodder, and afterward more cruelly enslaved than ever. That's all war means for him." In a lower voice he added: "It's quite simple: I see nothing, literally nothing, that could be worse for a nation than a war and all that it involves."

"Quite simple," Roy retorted dryly. "And even a little oversimplified, if you'll permit me to say so. As if a nation had nothing to gain by a successful war!"

"Nothing! Under any circumstances whatever!"

Antoine's voice rang out authoritatively. "That's untenable!"

Jacques looked round with a start. Till now, seated at his desk, with lowered eyes, Antoine had seemed absorbed in the perusal of his morning mail. In point of fact he had not missed a word of what was being said a few yards from him. Without getting up or looking at his brother, he went on. "Historically untenable. All history—beginning with Joan of Arc …"

"I wonder!" Jousselin put in lightly. "Who knows? If it hadn't been for the Maid, perhaps France and England would have become united into a single kingdom. To the demerit of Charles VII, I grant, but perhaps to the great advantage of the two nations, which would have been spared no end of unpleasant happenings."

"No, Jousselin," Antoine expostulated, "do let's talk seriously… . Would you deny, for instance, that Germany gained anything at Sadowa and Sedan?"

"Germany," Jacques retorted, "as a nation, as a figurehead—yes. But what about the German people? What did the man in the street gain by those 'glorious victories'?"

Roy stiffened up. "And supposing by next Easter—Easter, 1915—France has reconquered Alsace and Lorraine, extended her frontier to the Rhine, annexed the mines of the Saar basin, and added the German colonies in Africa to her empire; supposing that, by force of arms, she has become the greatest power on the Continent, will anyone dare to say that France has gained nothing by the sacrifice of her sons?"

He gave a good-humoured laugh and, obviously supposing he had said the last, irrefutable word, took out his cigarette-case and, drawing a chair toward him, perched himself astride it.

"I'm afraid it's not so simple as all that," Jousselin, who was standing beside Jacques, remarked in a low, brooding voice.

Jacques turned to him, and he, too, lowered his voice. "No, I won't condone the use of violence—even in self-defence. I won't leave any loophole open in my mind to any thought whatever that can lure me into violence. I won't take part in any war, whether they label it 'just' or 'unjust,' whatever its origins and motives."

He stopped abruptly, breathless with emotion, and inwardly added: "Not even in a civil war," as he recalled the heated discussions he had had with Mithoerg and his like, revolutionaries who drew the line at nothing. To such men he would say: "It's not to an orgy of blood and hatred that I wish to owe the triumph of the cause on which my heart is set, the cause of human brotherhood."

# Chapter VII

"IT'S not so simple as all that," Jousselin repeated, sweeping the others' faces with his slow, mild gaze; then he relapsed into silence. After a while, as though his thoughts had taken a new turning, he added in another tone: "Of course, we doctors are privileged in a sense; we shouldn't be asked to take a hand in the slaughter. We'd be mobilized not as killers but as healers."

"That's right," Studler put in quickly and turned to Jousselin, his mild eyes beaming with impulsive gratitude.

"And suppose you weren't doctors?" Roy rapped out, staring at each in turn with a challenging gaze. All present knew that he had not given the army authorities formal notice of his medical qualifications, and that, during his period of military service, he had, after a brief spell in a hospital unit, had himself returned to duty with his regiment and at present held the rank of second lieutenant in an infantry regiment.

"Look here, Manuel old boy," Antoine grumbled, "aren't you ever going to give us our coffee?"

He gave the impression of grasping at any pretext for cutting short the discussion and breaking up the group of disputants.

"Right you are, Chief!" The young man leaped briskly to his feet, swinging a leg over the back of the chair on which he had been sitting astride.

"Isaac!" Antoine called.

Studler approached and Antoine handed him a letter. "See this? Those fellows at the Philadelphia Institute have at last deigned to answer us." And, by force of habit added: "For the file, please."

Studler merely stared at him amazedly, without taking the letter. Forcing his lips into a would-be smile, Antoine tossed the letter into the wastepaper-basket.

Jousselin and Jacques had remained standing at the far end of the spacious room, at some distance from the others.

"Doctor or not," Jacques began, without looking in his brother's direction but in a louder tone than he would have used were the words intended for his neighbour only, "any man who obeys the mobilization order is assenting to a nationalistic policy and, by the same token, to war. For, to my thinking, the issue is the same for everyone: Does the mere fact that a government has given you orders to do so warrant your taking part in the butchery?" He bent closer toward Jousselin. "Even if I weren't … what I am, even if I were a law-abiding Frenchman, well-pleased with his country's institutions, I shouldn't admit the notion that any 'reason of state' could force me to overrule what is for me a duty to my conscience. A government that arrogates the right of dictating to the consciences of its subjects must not reckon on their support. And a social system that doesn't take account, first and foremost, of the moral standards of its members only gets what it deserves if they despise it and revolt against it."

Jousselin nodded, remarking: "I was a passionate defender of poor Dreyfus."

Antoine, who had seemed to be working at his desk, swung round. "The problem's badly stated." His voice rang clear, incisive. He had risen and, his eyes fixed on Jacques, walked toward the middle of the room. "A democratic government like ours, even when its policy is disapproved of by the minority in opposition, is in power only because it legally represents the will of the greatest number. Thus the man who joins his regiment when he is called up for service is obeying the collective will of the nation—whatever his personal views may be as to the line of policy the government in power is following."

"You speak of the will of the greatest number," Studler said. "But at the present moment by far the greatest number, not to say the whole population of the country, are hoping that there will not be a war."

Jacques spoke again, taking care not to seem to address his brother and fixing his gaze rather awkwardly on Jousselin. "What possible justification can there be for asking the great mass of people to act against their considered, legitimate opinions and to subordinate their most cherished convictions to a blind obedience to the state?"

"What justification …?" Roy exclaimed, stiffening up as if he had been dealt a blow.

"What, indeed?" echoed M. Chasle.

"The justification," Antoine firmly retorted, "is the social contract."

Roy looked Jacques and Studler up and down, as though defying them to answer. Then with a scornful lift of his shoulders he turned on his heel, strode across the room to a chair beside the window, and ensconced himself in it, turning his back on the others.

Antoine seemed in a brown study; his eyes fixed on the carpet, he was stirring his coffee with an insistence that betrayed the tension of his nerves.

Jousselin's voice broke the ensuing silence. "I quite understand you, Chief," he said in an amiable tone, "and, all things considered, I believe I think as you do. The existing social system, with all its alleged shortcomings, is nevertheless a reality for us, for the men of our generation. It's something solid, or fairly so, a sort of platform that previous generations have built up and made over to us—a platform on which we too have found our footing. I feel that … very strongly indeed."

"Just so." Antoine went on stirring his coffee, without looking up. "As individuals, we're feeble, isolated, ineffectual units. Our strength, or the greater part of it—in any case, the possibility of applying our strength to fruitful ends—is something we owe to the social group that holds us together, coordinates our activities. And for us, in the present state of things, this group isn't a mere fiction; it's something quite definite and localized in space—and its name is … France."

He spoke slowly, in a sad but resolute tone, as though he had long pondered over what he had to say and was glad to have an opportunity of giving voice to his conclusions.

"Yes," he continued, "all of us are members of a national association, and thus to all intents and purposes subordinate to it. It is this association which enables us to be what we are, to live in almost complete security and to carry on our lives as civilized beings within its framework. Between us and this association there has existed an age-old pact, a voluntary pact, which is binding on every one of us. It isn't a matter of choice; it's a matter of fact. So long as men live in social groups, I don't see how individual members of a group can cry off their duties toward the community which protects them and in the amenities of which they share."

"Not all," Studler interjected.

Antoine threw a quick glance at him. “Yes, all. Unequally, perhaps, but all to some extent. You and I; the worker and the bourgeois; the ward-attendant and the house-physician. By the mere fact that from birth we are members of a community and each of us occupies a place in it, a privilege which he turns daily to account. And, in return for this, it’s up to him to abide by the social contract. Now one of the first clauses of the contract is this: everyone must respect and obey the laws of the land, even if, in the course of his private ruminations on things in general, some of them may seem to him unjust. If people started repudiating their duties to the state, it would mean a break-up of the whole system of institutions which make a national community like that of France a living, thriving organism. It would undermine the whole social structure… .”

“Yes,” Jacques murmured.

“And what is more”—there was an almost vicious edge to Antoine’s voice—“it would be a shortsighted line of action. It would work against the true interests of the individual as well. For the chaos that would come of this anarchic revolt against law and order would entail for him infinitely more disagreeable consequences than if he had submitted to the law of the land, for all its imperfections.”

“I wonder!” Studler put in quickly.

Antoine cast another glance at the Caliph and this time took a step toward him. “As members of the community, haven’t we got to submit time and again to laws of which as private citizens we disapprove? Meanwhile, of course, the state authorizes us to break a lance with it if we so wish; freedom of thought and speech is still permitted in France. What’s more, we have a legal weapon always at hand—the ballot.”

Studler riposted with an ironic snort. “The ballot, indeed! It’s a barefaced fraud, this so-called universal franchise here in France. In a population of forty millions barely twelve millions have the vote. So if six millions and the odd man out vote one way it constitutes what they’ve the nerve to call a majority of the nation. Thirty-four million poor benighted fools bow to the will of six million voters, and I needn’t tell you how they vote—with their eyes shut, under the influence of barroom gossip. No, the Frenchman has no real political power. Has he, for instance, any means of altering the Constitution, of protesting against or even discussing the new laws that are foisted on him? He isn’t even asked for his opinion on alliances that are entered into in his name and which may land him in wars that may very well cost him his life. So much for what in France we call the ‘sovereign rights of the people’!”

“I beg your pardon,” Antoine replied composedly. “I can’t say I feel so helpless as all that. Obviously I’m not personally consulted about every detail of the nation’s life. But if the powers that be adopt a line of policy distasteful to me, I can always vote for those who will oppose it in Parliament. Meanwhile, so long as my vote has failed to put out of power the parties which, as things are, represent the wishes of the majority, and to replace them by others which will modify the national policy on the lines that I desire—until that happens, my duty is plain and there’s no getting around it. I’m bound by the social contract. I must make the best of it. I must obey.”

“*Dura lex*,” M. Chasle was heard to twitter sagely in the pause that followed, “ ‘sad’ *lex*, indeed.”

The Caliph was stamping up and down the room. “It’s a moot point,” he grunted, “whether, all things considered, the revolutionary troubles that would follow a general refusal to obey the mobilization order mightn’t be a vastly lesser evil than …”

“Than even the shortest of wars,” Jacques concluded the phrase.

From the far end of the room came a sudden creak of chair-springs; Roy had moved, but he said nothing.

“Personally, Chief,” Jousselin said quietly, “I think as you do; I’ll obey. Still, I can well understand that to some people, at so dramatic a moment—on the brink of a catastrophe like the one that’s threatening us now—obedience may seem a duty that’s inhuman, intolerable.”

“On the contrary,” Antoine rejoined. “The more a man is conscious o£ the gravity of the situation, the more compelling he should find the call of duty.”

There was a pause while he replaced his coffee-cup on the tray, untasted. His lips were twitching.

“I’ve been having it out with myself during these last few days,” he suddenly confessed in a voice so shaken and forlorn that involuntarily Jacques swung round and gazed at him. Antoine had pressed his thumb and forefinger into the sockets of his eyes, and he stayed thus for some moments before looking up and darting a keen, enigmatic glance at his brother. Then, weighing his words, he spoke again. “If an order for mobilization were issued tonight by a government elected by the majority—even if I had voted against it—well, it’s not because of any personal views I may have about war, because I belonged to a minority in opposition, that I’d give myself the right to break the social compact deliberately and sneak out of duties which are the same, exactly the same, for every one of us.”

Jacques heard him out with only the faintest impulse to protest against these remarks, so obviously intended for himself. He felt far less revolted by Antoine’s views than touched, in spite of himself, by the profoundly human, vibrant, personal emotion that lay behind the dogmatic tone in which they were expressed. Moreover, however great the cleavage between his brother’s outlook and his own, he had to admit that under the circumstances Antoine’s attitude was wholly logical, self-consistent.

Testily, as though someone had voiced a flatly contrary opinion, Antoine folded his arms, exclaiming: “Damn it all, that would be really too convenient if one could keep one’s nationality up to the outbreak of a war and then discard it!”

A silence followed, tense with unspoken thoughts. Jousselin, whose sensitive mind had registered every shift of feeling, made haste to create a diversion. Genially, as if the debate were closed and agreement had been reached, he voiced the summing up. “In the last analysis, the Chief is right. Life in a community is a sort of game; either one abides by the rules or one stands out. It’s up to each of us to choose.”

A low voice beside him said: “I have chosen.”

Jousselin looked round; his eyes lingered on Jacques with involuntary emotion. It was as if he glimpsed beyond the living, real presence the vision of some tragic destiny.

Léon’s hairless face appeared in the chink of the half-open door. He said to Antoine: “You’re wanted on the telephone, sir.”

Antoine stared at the servant, blinking as if he had just been startled out of sleep. At last he pulled his wits together. “That’s Anne again,” he thought.

“Right. Coming.”

He paused a few moments, frowning with lowered eyes, then slowly walked out of the room.

"What's she going to say to me?" he murmured as he entered his study. " You don't care for me any more. You don't love me as much as you used to.' The time comes, ineluctably, when a woman starts saying that—every woman. She'd have quite a shock if someone told her *what* it is we 'don't care for any more'; that it isn't she but ourselves we've ceased to care for—oneself as one has come to be with her. She shouldn't say: 'You don't care for me any more,' but: 'You've ceased caring for the man that you become when we're together.' "

His eyes fell on the telephone; without quite being aware of what he was about, he took up the receiver.

"Is that you, Tony dear?"

He gave a start, almost of revolt, and stood still, listening to the familiar, too familiar voice, its low, bell-like cadences of exquisitely studied softness. He could not bring himself to answer. A cold rage came over him. For two days past he had felt delivered from her, from the thrall of passion. Not only freed, but cleansed, as if he had washed himself clean of some defilement. A thought of Simon crossed his mind. No, it was over and done with; their ways had parted for good and all. Why toy with any prospect of return?

Laying down the receiver gently in the center of the table, he drew back a step. He could hear an intermittent buzz, then a series of little, panting gasps that gruesomely evoked the stridence of a death-rattle… . No, there was no help for it; cost what it might, he must not resume contact with her… .

But, instead of going to rejoin his friends in the reception room, he turned the key of his study door, went back to the sofa, lit a cigarette, and, with a last glance at the table on which the telephone receiver, silent now, lay sleek and coiled like a small dead reptile, let his bulk sink heavily among the cushions.

Meanwhile, in the reception-room, M. Chasle had planted himself in front of the fireplace, where he had buttonholed Studler, and, delighted at being able in his turn to hold forth and be listened to, was trying to explain in his quaint jargon, muddled and malapropian, the nature of the business he had launched. "The latest wheezes, small inventions, gadgets, don't you know? The Very Latest, that's our slogan. What's that? Look here, I'll send you our little L.R. magazine. ('L.R.' stands for League of Researchers.) You'll see what I mean. We're thinking up new outlets, on the side, so to say. Got to, what with this war. Yes, we're going to strike out in a new direction. National defence. Everyone must do his bit. What's that?" He sprinkled such inquiries through his monologue in a tone of querulous anxiety, as if he had just failed to catch some vital question. "Why, already our researchers are turning in some most sensational inventions," he went on at once. "Got to keep 'em in the dark, of course, but I don't mind telling you that one is a portable filter. The soldier's friend. For filtering rain-water and pond-water. All the dangerous bacillaries that decimate the soldier's constitution, don't you know?" He gave a gleeful little chuckle. "And we've something even more sensational up our sleeve: an automatic gunsight with a trigger release, for infantrymen with bad eyesight. Or even for gunners."

Roy, who had been vaguely listening from his chair to the old fellow's divagations, now stood up.

"An automatic sight? How on earth …?"

"Exactly," M. Chasle piped, highly flattered. "That's the charm of it."

"But, damn it, how does it work?"

Chasle replied with a lofty flourish of his hand: "All by itself."

Jacques and Jousselin had not moved from the corner near the bookshelves, and were conversing in low tones. An angry frown furrowed Jacques's brow. "The most exasperating thing," he was saying, "is to think that a day is bound to come, in the near future very likely, when people simply won't be able to understand how this business of military service, nations in arms, and so forth, ever came to be regarded as something necessary and warfare as an almost sacred duty; a day when it will seem unthinkable that a representative tribunal could have a man shot for refusing to take up arms. Exactly as it seems preposterous to us today that in the past thousands of men were tried and tortured for their religious beliefs."

Before Jousselin could reply, Roy's voice was heard. "Just listen to this!" He had picked up a newspaper from the desk and was skimming its contents. In clear, crisp tones, his eyes dancing with laughter, he read:

> "Young married couple with one child wish to rent for three months country cottage with old-world garden, and good fishing in the vicinity, preferably in Normandy or Burgundy. Write Box 3418."

His laugh rang crystal-clear. He was the only one of them who knew how to laugh that day.

"Cheerful as a schoolboy off for the holidays," Jacques observed.

"No," Jousselin amended. "Cheerful as a true hero should be; when there's no joy, there isn't any heroism—only valour."

M. Chasle had taken out his watch and, as he always did before looking at the dial, held it to his ear with the absorbed air of a doctor listening to a patient's heart. Then, lifting his brows over the rim of his spectacles, he announced: "One-thirty-seven."

Jacques gave a start. "I'm late," he said, shaking hands with Jousselin. "I must be on my way; I can't wait for my brother."

Antoine, who was lying on the sofa, heard Jacques's voice in the hall as Léon showed him out. He flung the study door open, and shouted: "Jacques! Wait!"

As Jacques, much surprised, turned and walked toward him, Antoine added: "Going away already?"

"Yes."

Antoine laid his hand on Jacques's arm. "Come in for a moment," he said rather unsteadily.

Jacques had come to his brother's place with the intention of having a private talk with him; he proposed to let him know the use to which he was putting his father's legacy, for he did not care to seem to be making a secret of it from Antoine. He had even had an idea of mentioning Jenny as well. So he fell in with his brother's suggestion readily enough and entered the study.

Antoine closed the door, and remained standing near it. "Listen!" he said. "Let's talk seriously now, old man. What exactly do you intend to do?"

Jacques feigned an air of bewilderment, and made no reply.

"You've been exempted," Antoine went on, "on grounds of health. But if there's a general mobilization, they'll revise all such exemptions and pack off pretty nearly everyone to the firing-line. What do you propose to do about it?"

Jacques saw that he was cornered. "Well," he said, "I've no idea as yet. For the moment, they can't get at me; so far as the law's concerned, I'm out of their clutches." Seeing his brother's eyes still fixed on him insistently, he added: "Anyhow, this much I can tell

you—I'd rather cut off both my hands than let myself be mobilized."

For a moment Antoine looked away. "That, in my opinion, is the attitude of …"

"A coward?"

"No," Antoine protested affectionately, "that's not what I meant at all… . The attitude of—shall we say?—an egoist." Jacques took it without flinching; Antoine continued: "Don't you agree? To refuse to do one's duty at such a moment is to sacrifice the public interest to one's own."

"To sacrifice the *national* interest, yes. But the interest of the general public, of the masses, lies most obviously in peace and not in war."

Antoine made a vague gesture, as though to wave away such purely theoretical considerations. But Jacques pressed his argument home. "It's I who am furthering the interests of the public by refusing to join up. And I'm certain, absolutely certain, that the voice within me which says 'No' is the voice of all that's best in me."

It cost Antoine an effort not to betray his impatience. "That's all very well, but—! Look here, what practical effects do you expect your standing out to have? None whatever. Once a general mobilization is decreed, and the vast majority (as is bound to happen) answer the call to national defence, what could be more futile, more surely doomed to failure, than an isolated gesture like yours, a one-man mutiny?"

Antoine's tone was so carefully controlled and so affectionate that Jacques was touched by it. He gazed at his brother quite calmly, even conjuring up the ghost of a smile. "Why go over all the ground again, old man? You know quite well what my views are. I'll never tolerate the idea that a government can force me into taking part in an enterprise I look on as a crime, a betrayal of truth and justice and human solidarity. Heroism, as I see it, isn't in Roy's camp; it doesn't consist in shouldering a gun and marching to the frontier. No, the truly heroic thing is to refuse to fight, to let oneself be led before the firing-squad rather than submit to being roped in as an accomplice. 'A futile sacrifice,' you say? Who knows? What has made wars possible in the past and makes them possible still is the tame submission of the masses to their governments. 'A one-man mutiny,' you say? Well, if those with the courage to say 'No' are few in number, it can't be helped. It may be simply because"—he hesitated—"because a certain type of moral courage is pretty rare."

Antoine had listened standing statue-still but for an almost imperceptible tremor of his eyebrows. He was staring fixedly at his brother, breathing rather heavily, like a man asleep. At last he replied in a gentle, understanding voice. "I don't deny that it needs a rare moral courage to stand out, alone or almost alone, against an order for general mobilization. But it's a courage put forth in vain, that runs its head idiotically against a brick wall. A man of strong convictions who refuses to fight and gets himself shot for his principles has all my sympathy, and pity. But I regard him as a futile dreamer—and I say he's wrong."

Jacques's only response was a slight raising of his arms—the same gesture as he had made when saying: "It can't be helped."

Antoine gazed at him in silence; but he had not yet given up hope. "The facts are these," he said at last, "and there's no getting away from them. Tomorrow the serious turn events have taken—it looks as if they'd got completely out of hand—may compel the government to call on our services. Do you seriously think this is the moment for us to start questioning if the duties imposed on us by our country fit in with our personal opinions? No, the men in charge have got to decide for us and tell us how to act. In my profession, when I prescribe for some urgent case a course of treatment that I judge advisable, I don't allow anybody to question it."

He raised his hand toward his forehead and for a moment pressed his fingers on his eyelids; when he spoke again, the words came with an effort.

"Think it over, boy. It's not a matter of approving of the war—do you think I approve of it?—but of seeing it through. In a spirit of revolt, perhaps, if we're built that way, but a revolt that we keep to ourselves, that our sense of duty reduces to an inward protest. To haggle over doing one's share in the hour of danger would be to let down the nation as a whole. Yes, I see the conduct of the man who insists on standing out as nothing less than treachery, a crime against his fellow-men. Mind you, I don't say one hasn't got the right to criticize decisions that the government may think fit to make. But only later on—after one has done one's duty."

Again the ghost of a smile flitted across Jacques's lips. "I'm afraid I don't agree; my view is that the private citizen has the right to dissociate himself entirely from the nationalist ambitions in the name of which countries go to war. I deny that the state is justified in forcing a man, for any reason whatsoever, to go against his conscience. High-sounding phrases—I hate to be always using them! But there it is! Somehow my conscience makes itself heard above time-serving arguments like those you've just been using. Above the laws of the land as well. The only way to prevent violence from being the deciding factor in world affairs is to refuse point-blank to take a hand in violence. In my opinion, the refusal to take part in killing one's fellow-men is a sign of nobility of mind and entitled to respect. If your codes and judges don't respect it, so much the worse for them. Sooner or later the day of reckoning will come."

"Have it your own way!" Antoine sounded annoyed; it vexed him to find the conversation diverted once more toward generalities. Folding his arms, he asked: "But what actually do you propose to do?"

He walked up to Jacques and, with one of those impulsive gestures that were so rare between the brothers, affectionately clasped Jacques's shoulders with both hands. "Tell me, Jacques old man. They're mobilizing tomorrow. What are you going to do?"

Quietly but firmly Jacques freed himself. "I'll go on fighting against war. To the end. By every method. Including, if need be, revolutionary methods, sabotage." Despite himself, his voice had sunk to a whisper, and now he paused as if struggling with a dark oppression. After a while he added: "I say that … I don't know… . But one thing's absolutely certain, Antoine. You'll never see me in uniform!"

With a forlorn, ineffectual smile, a hasty gesture of farewell, he turned and walked to the door. Antoine made no effort to detain him.

# Chapter VIII

JENNY was dressed to go out when Jacques came. Her haggard, woebegone appearance betrayed her state of feverish anxiety. No news of any sort had come from her mother or from Daniel, and she was the prey of vague, unformulated apprehensions. The newspapers had added to her alarm and, to crown all, Jacques was overdue. She could not rid her mind of memories of their brush with the police after Jacques's speech; something had happened to him, she was convinced… . Unable to utter a word, she flung herself into his arms.

"I've tried," he said, "to discover exactly what they're doing about foreigners in Austria. I'm afraid we must face the fact that the country's under martial law. German subjects are still being allowed to go back to their country; so, I believe, are Italians, though relations between Italy and Austria are extremely strained. But it's another thing for French, British, and Russian subjects. If your mother didn't leave Vienna some days ago—and, if she had, she'd have been here by now—I'm afraid it's too late. I mean, she'll be prevented from leaving."

"Prevented? How? Will they put her in prison?"

"Of course not. The most they'll do will be to refuse permits to travel. That will last a week or two while they wait to see the turn events are taking and the international situation is being cleared up."

Jenny made no reply. Already Jacques's presence had laid the spectres of her fear. She clung to him, giving herself up blindly, rapturously, to the ecstasy of their embrace, for the return of which she had been longing through the hours of absence. At last she slipped from his arms, imploring brokenly: "I can't bear being left alone, Jacques! Take me with you. I want to be beside you always, everywhere."

They set off on foot toward the Luxembourg Gardens. "We'll catch a tram at the Medicis corner," Jacques said.

Usually crowded in the afternoon, the gardens were almost empty that day. The treetops rustled in a light breeze and a cloying scent of marigolds rose from the flower-beds. On an isolated bench a pair of lovers, pressed so closely to each other that their features were hidden, seemed to fill the languid air with amorous vibrations.

After crossing the gardens, they were plunged again into the seething tumult of the streets, whose fitful rumble seemed an echo of the alarming rumours which on that fine summer afternoon were speeding from one end of Europe to the other. Two days before, Paris had been depleted by the exodus of holiday-makers; now, abruptly, it was full again. The air was strident with the cries of newsvenders selling special editions. While Jacques and Jenny waited for their tram, a station bus drawn by two horses rattled past. Inside, several families—parents, children, nurses—were huddled close together; among the piles of luggage on the roof were to be seen a shrimping-net, a parasol, and a perambulator.

"People who don't know when they're beaten," Jacques observed, "defying destiny!"

There was no break in the traffic along the Boulevard Saint-Michel and adjoining streets. Yet here was neither the bustle of a weekday nor the leisurely disorder of a fine Sunday afternoon; rather the chaotic ferment of a flustered antheap. People hurried along as though pressed for time, but their absent gaze and vacillation over which way to turn at the street-corners showed plainly enough that few of them knew or cared where they were going. Unable to face up to themselves—or to the look of things—alone, they had left homes and jobs, with the sole object of escaping from their thoughts and being able for a while to merge their personal forebodings in the collective apprehension of the crowd.

All afternoon, silent and faithful as his shadow, Jenny followed Jacques, from the Latin Quarter to the Batignolles, from the Glacière to the Bastille, from the Bercy docks to the Château d'Eau. Everywhere they heard the same chorus of indignation at the turn events had taken, but everywhere, too, they found most people already bowing to the storm, meekly preparing to see it through.

Now and then, when they happened to be alone, Jenny would begin talking about herself, or the weather, without the least constraint. "Really, I shouldn't have worn this veil. Let's cross the road and look at that flower-shop. It's getting a bit cooler now, don't you feel it? One can breathe again." Jacques felt slightly irritated by this harmless small-talk, which seemed abruptly to place on equal footing a florist's display, the European crisis, and a drop in the temperature. At such moments he would cast an indifferent, almost surly glance at his companion, and the dark fires that slumbered in his eyes would suddenly abash her into silence. But sometimes, too, he would turn away and, in gentler mood, ask himself: "Am I right in mixing her up in all this?"

At C.G.T. headquarters he caught one of his friends, whom they chanced to meet in the hall, casting a severe, appraising glance at Jenny. And suddenly he became conscious of how out of keeping she must look in these dusty precincts, among these workingmen—in her neat tailor-made costume, with her crape veil, and, in her bearing and expression, that subtle difference which bespeaks a certain social milieu. It made him so uncomfortable that he hurried her out of the place at once.

Clocks were striking seven. By way of the boulevards they walked to the Bourse quarter. Jenny was tired. The vital force that emanated from Jacques, while dominating her, sapped her energies. She remembered how in the old days she used often to have the same feeling of exhaustion and strain when she was with him. It was due to the continuous mental effort that he seemed to expect from those around him and, indeed, forced upon them by his tone of voice, his compelling gaze, and his sudden shifts of thought.

As they were nearing the *Humanité* office, Cadieux came running from the opposite direction. "We're in for it!" he bawled. "Germany's mobilizing. Russia has brought it off!" Jacques swung round abruptly, but Cadieux was almost out of sight. "I've got to find out. Wait for me here." He was chary of taking Jenny with him into the newspaper office.

Crossing the road, she began pacing up and down the sidewalk. Like bees coming and going at a hive, people were swarming in and out of the building Jacques had entered.

He came back after an hour, looking greatly disturbed. "It's official. The news comes from Germany. I've seen Groussier, Sembat, Vaillant, Renaudel. They're all gathered there, waiting for more details. Cadieux and Marc Levoir are running to and fro between the Quai d'Orsay and the newspaper office. Germany's mobilizing because Russia's speeding up her preparations. The question is: Is it a real mobilization? Jaurés swears it isn't. It's what they call in German *Kriegsgefahrzustand*—something we've no exact equivalent for in French. Jaurés, dictionary in hand, gave us the literal translation: 'A state of danger of war.' He's a marvel, the Skipper. Nothing

makes him give up hope. He's still under the influence of the conversations he had at Brussels with Haase and the German Socialists. He keeps on saying: 'So long as those fellows are with us, nothing's lost.' "

He had taken Jenny's arm and hurried her along beside him, walking blindly ahead. They went round the block of houses several times in this way.

"What is France going to do?" Jenny asked. "It seems that a Cabinet Council has been summoned for four o'clock. A communiqué has been issued to the effect that the Cabinet has decided 'to take all necessary steps for safeguarding our frontiers.' The Havas news agency reports this evening that our covering troops have taken up their advanced posts, but the General Staff proposes to leave an unoccupied zone a mile or two deep along the frontier so as not to give the enemy a pretext for launching an attack. The German Ambassador is in conference with Viviani at the present moment. Gallot, who's well up as regards German methods, takes a gloomy view; he says it's no use our nursing illusions as to what is meant by a *Kriegsgefahrzastand*; it's merely a backstairs form of mobilization, pending its official announcement. In any case Germany is now under martial law; which means that the press is muzzled, and antiwar demonstrations can no longer take place over there. That, to my mind, is perhaps the most serious thing; I see no hope of saving the situation except by a rising of the masses… . Stefany, however, is like Jaurés—obstinately optimistic. They say that the Kaiser, by taking this preliminary measure instead of mobilizing right away, has shown his peaceable intentions. After all, there may be something in that view. Germany's left the door open for the Russian government to make a conciliatory move at the eleventh hour, perhaps to call off mobilization. It seems that since yesterday there's been a steady stream of private telegrams between the Kaiser and the Tsar. Just as I was leaving Stefany, Jaurés was called to the phone. Brussels had rung him up and they all seemed full of hope that the message would prove important. I didn't stay, as I'd kept you waiting so long already… ."

"Don't bother about me!" Jenny exclaimed promptly. "Go back at once, Jacques. I'll wait for you."

"What, in the street? No—look here. I'll take you to the Progrès; at least you can sit down there."

As they were hurrying to the café, a hollow voice behind them growled: "Good day!"

Jenny looked round. The speaker was an old man whose face brought to mind that of the Saviour in early works of art; round him billowed the flowing black smock worn by French printers. It was Mourlan.

"Germany's mobilizing," Jacques said at once.

"Of course she is. It was a Sure thing, anyhow." He spat. "There's nothing to be done. There never is! And there'll be nothing to be done for many a long day yet. Everything's got to be smashed, to start with. Our whole damned civilization's got to go before we can bring any decency into the world." After a pause he added: "Going to the Progrès? Yes? So'm I."

They took a few steps in silence before the old printer spoke again. "Look here! Have you thought over what I told you this morning? Aren't you going to clear out of here?"

"Not yet."

"Please yourself, boy. But I've just been told …" He hesitated, glanced at Jenny, then fixed his eyes meaningly on Jacques. "I've something to say to you."

"Say it." Jacques laid his hand on Jenny's arm and, to emphasize the gesture, he added: "You can speak freely. Anything you say won't go further."

"Right!" Mourlan placed two gnarled fingers on Jacques's shoulder and lowered his voice. "Here's a tip straight from the horse's mouth. The War Minister signed an order today for the arrest of all the suspects on the B List."

"What!" Jacques exclaimed.

The old man nodded and muttered between his teeth: "So all concerned had better watch their step!"

Then he noticed that Jenny had gone quite white and was staring at him aghast. He smiled to her. "Now, now, young lady, there's no need to take on like that. It don't mean we'll all be lined up against a wall tonight. But the order's been signed so as to have it ready when the time comes. When they want to get us out of the way and stage their big parade without anyone to say 'Boo!' to them, they'll only have to tell their special squads to carry out the order. The dicks have started already in the suburbs. I hear they've searched the premises of the *Drapeau Rouge* and *La Lutte*. Iszakovitch was very nearly copped this morning in a police raid at Puteaux. Fuzet's in jail; he's charged with having made that poster 'Blood on Their Hands'—you know, the one against the General Staff. There's trouble brewing, young 'uns, and you'd best keep your eyes skinned."

They entered the café. Jacques led Jenny to a table in the lower room, which was practically empty. He turned to Mourlan. "Have a drink with us."

"No, thanks." Mourlan pointed to the ceiling. "I'm going upstairs for a bit to see what they're up to now. What a lot o' bunk must have been talked up there since this morning!" Shaking Jacques's hand, he said again in a low voice: "Take my tip, boy, and clear out of Paris!"

He bestowed on the two young people a large, genial, unexpected smile before turning and stumping noisily up the narrow spiral staircase.

"Where will you sleep tonight?" Jenny asked anxiously. "Surely not at that hotel whose address you gave them last night?"

"Oh," he replied carelessly, "I'm far from certain they've done me the honour of putting me on their famous blacklist." Then, seeing the consternation in her eyes, he added: "Anyhow, you needn't worry, I'm not going back to Liébaert's. I deposited my bag this morning at Mourlan's place. And the only documents I have which might be compromising are in that package I left with you."

"Yes," she said, looking him in the eyes. "Our apartment is perfectly safe."

He had not sat down. He ordered tea but had not patience enough to wait till it was brought. "You're all right here, aren't you? I'll just run round to the *Humanité*. Don't move from here."

"Sure you'll come back?" she asked in a frightened voice. A sudden panic had swept over her; she looked down to hide from him her discomfiture. But then she felt the pressure of Jacques's hand on hers and the unspoken reproach brought a blush to her cheeks. "I didn't mean that. Go at once. I'll be quite all right."

After he had gone, she took some sips of the so-called tea the waiter had set on the table; it tasted bitter; pushing the cup away, she rested her elbows on the cool marble.

Through the wide-open window, with the noises of the street, a flood of dazzling sunshine came pouring in, flashing upon the mirrors, glinting on the brass fittings, glass, and smooth mahogany of the counter. Behind it, in a haze of broken lights, to a sound of

running water, the café owner was busy rinsing out pitchers. Newspapers lay scattered on the tables. Jenny gazed idly at the scene, her mind void of thought. As the slow minutes passed, her tired brain grew peopled with a phantom horde of dark forebodings, sudden fears, obsessions of her early youth. She tried to fix her attention on a grey cat curled up on the seat beside her. Was it really sleeping? Its eyes were closed, but its ears twitched and its whole attitude struck her as constrained, as though it were trying to force itself to sleep. Had the vague panic brooding in the air somehow affected even the cats of Paris? *Was* it asleep—or only pretending? Pretending for whose benefit? For its own, perhaps… . Night was falling. Every minute workmen were coming in, exchanging a conspiratorial glance with the café owner, then marching upstairs. Each time the door of the room above was opened, there came a gust of noise, of voices raised in argument mingling with the rumour of the street.

"Here I am!"

Jenny gave a start; she had not seen him coming.

He sat down beside her. His brows were beaded with sweat. With a toss of his head he jerked back his dangling forelock, then began mopping his face. "There's a bit of news come in," he said in an undertone, "that's like a ray of light in the 'encircling gloom.' That telephone call was a message sent us by the German Social-Democrats via Brussels. They're not giving up the struggle; quite the contrary. Jaurés is right: those fellows are loyal to the core, nothing will make them flinch. Of course, they're up against it at that end, just as we are. And they're more eager than ever to keep in touch so that we all can act in concert. Only, with martial law proclaimed in Germany, it's going to be pretty hard to keep in communication. So by way of Belgium they're sending a delegate named. Hermann Müller; he'll be in Paris tomorrow and, I gather, he'll have, full powers to pledge his Party. The idea is that he will arrange with the French Socialists to take immediate action on a large scale against'the forces making for war. You see? At the *Humanité* all hopes centre on this unlooked-for opportunity, this eleventh-hour meeting that will take place tomorrow between Müller and Jaurés—the pact of the two proletariats. There's no doubt that far-reaching decisions will be reached between them. Stefany tells me the idea's to organize in both countries a vast, simultaneous revolt of the whole working-class. It was overdue. But it's never too late. With a general strike we've still good prospects of success."

He spoke rapidly, in jerky phrases; his excitement was infectious.

"The Skipper's going to publish tomorrow a really terrific feature article—something on the lines of Zola's famous *J'accuse*."

Jenny's slightly puzzled look told him that the Zola allusion—which, in fact, was not his own, but came from Pagès, Gallot's secretary—was lost on her; for a few moments he was dismayed at the thought of all that still divided her from him.

"Did you talk to Jaurés?" she innocently inquired.

"No, not this time. But I happened to be with Pagès on the stairs when Jaurés was leaving. As usual he had a number of friends with him, and I heard what he was saying to them. 'I'll leave nothing out in the article I'm publishing tomorrow. I mean to denounce everyone who's been mixed up in the dirty business. Yes, this time I'll tell all I know.' And—would you believe it?—he was laughing as he spoke, I'll swear to it. Positively guffawing. He has a laugh that's all his own, a big, hearty, heartening chuckle. After that he said: 'Let's have some dinner first, anyhow. The nearest place, eh? What about Albert's?' "

She gazed at him without speaking.

"Would it amuse you to have a close-up view of him?" Jacques asked. "We'll go and have something to eat at the Croissant. I'll point him out to you. I'm famished. We've earned our dinner, too, don't you agree?"

# Chapter IX

IT WAS after half-past nine and most of the Croissant's regular customers had left. Jacques and Jenny chose a table in an empty corner, to the right of the entrance.

On the left, several tables had been run together parallel to the Boulevard Montmartre, for Jaurés and his party.

"There he is," Jacques said. "In the middle, with his back to the window. Now he's turning to talk to Albert, the proprietor."

"He doesn't look so awfully worried." Jenny's tone of na'ive surprise enchanted Jacques. He gently squeezed her elbow. "Do you know those people with him?" she continued.

"Yes. The man on Jaurés's right is Philippe Landrieu. The fat man on his left is Renaudel. Dubreuihl is facing Renaudel, and Jean Longuet's beside him."

"Who's the woman?"

"Mme. Poisson, I think—the wife of the fellow opposite Landrieu. Next to her is Amédée Dunois. The two Renoult brothers are sitting in front of her. The man who's just come in and is standing by the table is a friend of Almereyda's and on the staff of the *Bonnet Rouge*, but I can't recall his …"

A crisp report, like the bang of a bursting tire, cut him short. Quickly there followed a second detonation, a shrill clash of breaking glass. A mirror on the back wall of the café had been shivered into fragments.

A moment of appalled silence, then a deafening uproar. Everybody was standing up, staring at the broken glass, talking excitedly. "Someone fired a shot at that glass!" "Who?" "Where from?" "From the street." "Why?"

Two waiters dashed outside. Shouts came from the street.

Instinctively Jacques had jumped up and, shielding Jenny with his arm, was trying to catch sight of Jaurés. He had a brief glimpse of the Skipper seated quite calmly at his place amid his friends, who had risen to their feet and gathered round him. He seemed to be slowly stooping to pick up something on the floor. Then Jacques lost sight of him.

The restaurant owner's wife ran past Jacques's table, screaming: "They've shot M. Jaurés!"

"Stay here!" Jacques pressed Jenny's shoulder, to make her sit down, then dashed over to the Skipper's table. A number of people had gathered round the little group of Jaurés's friends and barred the way. He heard breathless cries: "A doctor, quick." "Call the police!" Elbowing his way round the long table, he managed to reach a corner whence he could see a body lying on the wall-sofa, half concealed by Renaudel, who was bending over it. Then Renaudel straightened up, letting fall on the table a bloodstained napkin. Jacques caught sight of Jaurés's face; his lips were parted, his cheeks pale, and his eyes shut. He seemed to have fainted.

One of the men who had been dining in the restaurant—a doctor, apparently—pushed his way through the group. With a quick jerk he pulled off Jaurés's tie, opened his collar, and, grasping the drooping wrist, felt for the pulse.

Imperious cries broke through the hubbub: "Keep quiet there!" "Sh!" All eyes were riveted on the man holding the Skipper's wrist. He was bent double over the prostrate form, but his face was upturned and his eyes were fixed on the cornice in a trancelike stare. Then, without changing his position or looking at any of those present, he gently, sadly, shook his head.

People were flocking into the restaurant from the street. M. Albert shouted: "Shut the door! Close the windows and let down the shutters!"

An eddy of the crowd forced Jacques back into the middle of the room. Some of Jaurés's friends had lifted the body and were carefully transporting it to two empty tables that had been pushed together. The knot of people round the body was growing steadily denser, and all Jacques could make out was the white rim of a marble table-top and two huge, dusty, upended soles.

"Make way for the doctor!"

Andre Renoult had gone to get a doctor and the two men had entered together. They forced a way through the serried mass that yielded and closed in again behind them. The minute or two of agonized suspense that followed seemed interminable. Then Jacques saw the bent shoulders of the men in front of him straightening up and those who had kept their hats on taking them off. Low whispers passed from lip to lip: "He's dead." "Jaurés is dead."

His eyes full of tears, Jacques glanced over his shoulder in Jenny's direction. She had been waiting only for a look from him to hasten to his side. Threading her way toward him, she clasped his arm, without a word.

Meanwhile some policemen had entered the restaurant and begun to eject the public. There was a stampede toward the door; Jacques and Jenny were involved in it and hustled, clinging to each other, out into the street.

A man who had been parleying with the police officer outside managed to thrust his way past them into the restaurant. Jacques recognized him as Henri Fabre, a Socialist and an old friend of Jaurés. His face was pale; he was asking brokenly: "Where is he? Has he been taken to the hospital?"

No one dared reply, but a hand pointed awkwardly to the interior. Fabre followed the indication with his eyes and saw, in the centre of an empty space bathed in garish light, what looked like a bundle of black clothes laid on a marble slab, as dead bodies are laid out in the Morgue.

In the street, an emergency squad of police was trying to disperse the crowd that had collected and was blocking the thoroughfare. Jacques saw Jumelin and Rabbe talking excitedly to a police officer. Dragging Jenny in his wake, he pushed his way through to them. They had just come from the newspaper office and had themselves seen nothing, but it was from them he learned that the assassin had fired point-blank at Jaurés through the open window and taken to flight, but had speedily been caught by passers-by.

"Who is it? Where is he?"

"At the Rue du Mail police station."

"Come on," Jacques said to Jenny.

There was a crowd outside the police station. In vain Jacques showed his reporter's pass; no more persons were being allowed in.

They were about to go away when Cadieux, hatless, dashed out of the police office. Jacques managed to grab his arm as he ran past. Cadieux swung round and stared blankly at Jacques for a moment without recognizing him, though they had been talking to

each other near the *Humanité* offices only an hour or so before. At last he pulled himself together. “Ah, it’s you, Thibault. Well, there’s the first blood shed, the first victim… . Whose turn next?”

“Who was the murderer?” Jacques asked.

“His name is Villain. Nothing’s known about him. I saw him just now; quite a young fellow, twenty-five or so.”

“But why kill Jaurés? *Why?*”

“A patriot no doubt. A fanatic.”

He freed the elbow Jacques was holding, and started off again at a run.

“Let’s go back there,” Jacques said.

Clinging to Jacques’s arm, tense and silent, Jenny did her best to keep in step.

“You must be dead tired,” he said. “Supposing I leave you to rest somewhere? I’ll come back for you later.”

She was worn out with the day’s activities and emotions, but the thought of parting company with him at such an hour was unbearable. Without replying, she pressed herself more closely to him. He did not insist; this warm living presence at his side helped him to fight down his despair; he, too, did not relish the idea of being left to himself.

The night was sultry; hot fumes were still rising from the sunbaked asphalt. All the streets round the Rue Montmartre were thick with people. Traffic had halted. Every window was festooned with downward-peering faces. Strangers accosted each other as they passed. “Heard the news? Jaurés has just been murdered.”

A cordon of police had gradually cleared the sidewalk in front of the Croissant and now was busy keeping back successive waves of sightseers pouring up from the boulevards, where the tragic news had spread like wildfire.

As Jacques and Jenny came to the corner, a troop of mounted police came trotting from the Rue Saint-Marc. They began by clearing the approaches to the Rue des Victoires, as far as the Bourse. Then they deployed in the middle of the street facing the restaurant and, swinging their horses round, began pressing back the crowd toward the house-fronts. In the resulting confusion, while the more timid spirits were scattering up side-streets, Jacques and Jenny managed to edge their way into the front rank. Their eyes were fixed on the dark front of the restaurant, where all the iron shutters were down. Policemen were posted at the door; now and then it opened for a moment as a police officer went in or out, and there was a brief glimpse of the brilliantly lighted interior.

The cordon parted to make way for a couple of taxis and some official cars. The men alighting from them, after being saluted by the officer in charge, at once entered the restaurant. The door closed behind them immediately, while their names or titles were passed round in an undertone by those in the know. “That was the Chief Commissioner.” “Dr. Paul.” “The Prefect of the Seine.” “The Public Prosecutor.”

At last, clanging its bell persistently, an ambulance van drawn by one small horse came trotting down the Rue des Victoires. There was a sudden hush in the crowd. Police officers directed the ambulance to the entrance of the restaurant. Four attendants jumped out and went inside, leaving the big door open at the back of their van.

Ten minutes passed.

The crowd was growing restless. “What the hell are they up to in there?” “They have to draw up a formal report, you know, and it all takes time.”

Suddenly Jacques felt Jenny’s fingers tighten on his sleeve. Both leaves of the door stood open. Silence fell on the crowd. M. Albert stepped forth onto the sidewalk. Swarming with the black forms of policemen, the interior of the restaurant was a blaze of light, like a mortuary chapel. The black forms drew aside, making way for the stretcher. It was covered with a tablecloth. Four men, bareheaded, carried it; Jacques recognized them as Renaudel, Longuet, Compere-Morel, and Theo Bretin.

Instantaneously, all across the street bared their heads. From an upper window a single timid cry floated up into the darkness: “Death to the assassin!”

Slowly, in a silence so deep that the footfalls of the bearers were clearly audible, the white-hung stretcher crossed the sidewalk, swayed for a moment in mid-air, then abruptly slid forward into the darkness of the van. Two men sprang in after it. A police officer climbed onto the seat beside the driver. The door was slammed to. Then, as the horse broke into a trot and, escorted by policemen on bicycles, the ambulance started clanging its way toward the Bourse, there rose a sudden clamour, like the roar of an angry sea that drowned the jangling of the bell; it was as though at last flood-gates had fallen, releasing the pent-up emotions of the crowd. “Jaurés!” “Jaurés!” “Jaurés!” “Jaurés for ever!”

“Now,” Jacques whispered in Jenny’s ear, “let’s try to get to the *Huma*.”

But the crowd around them seemed rooted to the spot, unable to tear their eyes off the dark, mysterious facade, still guarded closely by the police.

“Jaurés … dead!” Jacques murmured brokenly. And, again, after a pause: “So Jaurés is dead! Somehow I can hardly believe it, and still less imagine what the consequences will be.”

Gradually the serried ranks of bystanders were loosening; it was getting possible to make a move.

“Come,” Jacques said.

The problem was how to get to the Rue du Croissant. The roads leading directly to it were certainly under police occupation and closed to the public.

“Let’s try a detour,” Jacques suggested. “We can take the Rue Fey-deau and then turn into the Passage Vivienne.”

No sooner had they left the Passage, a quiet side-street, and entered the seething Boulevard Montmartre, than a sudden onrush drove them helplessly forward.

They had blundered into a patriotic demonstration; a procession of young men waving flags and shouting the “Marseillaise” was marching down the boulevard, filling its whole width and driving all before it.

“To hell with Germany! Hang the Kaiser! Next stop—Berlin!”

Swept almost off her feet, Jenny felt herself losing her balance. She pictured herself wrenched from Jacques and trampled underfoot, and gave a faint scream of terror. But then she felt his arm round her waist, steadying her, pressing her closely to him. Somehow he managed to steer her athwart the torrent into the backwater of a doorway. The door was closed. Half blinded by the dust raised by the marching crowd, deafened by the noise and terrified by the frenzied, gaping faces brushing past hers, she suddenly caught sight of a brass knob on the door, just within reach. Summoning up what little energy remained to her, she stretched forth her

arm and grasped the knob with all her might. A moment later and she would have fallen in a faint on the sidewalk. As it was, her eyes closed, but her fingers did not relax their grip. She heard Jacques panting in her ear: "Hang on! Don't be alarmed. I'm holding you."

Some minutes passed and at last it seemed to her that the tumult was ebbing into the distance. She opened her eyes and saw Jacques's heartening smile. The human torrent was still driving past them, but in fitful waves, more slowly, and the shouts had ceased. These people were not taking part in the demonstration, but following out of curiosity. Jenny was still trembling all over, and could not get back her breath.

"Stick it out!" Jacques smiled. "You can see—it's almost over now!"

She pressed her hand to her forehead and, straightening her hat, discovered that her veil was torn. Absurdly, her first thought was: "What shall I say to Mamma!"

"Let's try to get away," Jacques said. "Do you feel strong enough to move?"

Their best plan was to follow the stream and turn at the first side-street. Jacques had given up his idea of going to the *Humanité* office, though it had cost him a brief pang of annoyance. But tonight something of his old self had changed—now that a frail, infinitely precious being had trustfully surrendered to his care. He knew that Jenny's nerves were near the breaking-point, and his one thought now was to get her safely back home. And Jenny no longer put a bold front on it or said: "Don't bother about me!" but hung on his arm and let him guide her steps. The way she leaned on him with all her weight told Jacques that, though she would not own to it, she was dropping with fatigue.

Walking slowly, they reached the Bourse, without having seen a taxi. Roadway and sidewalks alike were crowded with pedestrians. All Paris seemed out in the streets that night. News of the crime had been flashed onto the screen at all the motion-picture houses, in the course of the performance, and the audience had left in a state of consternation. Everybody they passed was talking loudly, on the same subject. Jacques caught scraps of conversation: "The railway-stations are under military occupation tonight." "Why are they so behindhand? Why didn't they mobilize before this?" "Well, as things are, nothing short of a miracle can save the situation." "I wired today to Charlotte to tell her to come back tomorrow with the children." "I says to her: 'My good woman, if you'd a son o' twenty-two, perhaps you wouldn't talk like that!' "

Newsboys were zigzagging across the crowd. "Murder of Jaurés! Latest Details!"

No taxis were at the rank in the Place de la Bourse. After getting Jenny to sit down on the stone plinth of the railings, Jacques remained standing beside her, staring at the flagstones.

"Jaurés is dead!" he murmured.

He was thinking: Who's to meet the German delegate tomorrow? And who's left to lead us now? Jaurés was the one man who would never have lost hope. The only man whom the government could never have managed to gag. The only one, perhaps, who might even now have put a stop to mobilization.

The lighted windows of the Bourse postoffice, into which belated customers were hurrying, threw a yellow glow on the sidewalk. It was there he had come to send the telegram to Daniel, on the night when Fontanin lay dying, the night Jenny had come back into his life. Less than two weeks ago! …

The special night editions of the papers on the news-stand flaunted alarming headlines: "All Europe under Arms." "The War-Clouds Gathering." "Germany on the Warpath. Cabinet Will Decide Tonight on Measures to Be Taken."

A drunken man staggering past them let out a maudlin cry: "No war! We don't want war!" and it struck Jacques that this was the first time he had heard such a cry tonight. It would have been rash to jump to any general conclusion. Still, the fact remained, and he duly noted it: neither the sight of murdered Jaurés's body nor the war-cries of the patriots on the boulevard had elicited a single cry of protest from the crowd—the selfsame crowd that yesterday in every public demonstration was still protesting loudly against war.

An empty taxi passed on the far side of the road. Some people signalled to it. Jacques dashed across, jumped onto the running-board, and had the driver draw up in front of Jenny.

They flung themselves into it without a word. The day's emotions had been overwhelming, and their nerves were on edge as if they had narrowly escaped an accident. Here at last was a haven from the outside world. Taking Jenny in his arms, Jacques strained her to his breast. Exhausted as he was, he felt a sort of paradoxical exhilaration, a zest for life that he had never known before.

"Jacques dear," Jenny whispered in his ear, "where will you spend the night?" Then very quickly, as if she had learned the words by rote, she added: "Come to our place. You won't be in any danger there. You can sleep on Daniel's sofa."

He did not reply at once. Very tenderly his fingers toyed with Jenny's hand, and now it was not only soft and yielding, as in the past, but warm with feverish, exultant life, returning his caresses.

"All right," he said.

It was only some minutes later, at the foot of the staircase, when, following Jenny, he became aware that instinctly he was walking on tiptoe as he passed the concierge's room, that he consciously took stock of the situation and, with it, of the proof of love and trust that Jenny was giving him. She was alone in Paris and, without her mother's or her brother's knowledge, had proposed that he should spend the night in the apartment with her. Jenny, he supposed, must be feeling the same discomfort that he himself felt at this moment—only far more acutely. He was mistaken. Jenny had thought it out, had satisfied herself that in acting as she now did she was doing right, and no other considerations weighed with her. Since their encounter with the police, she had been trembling for Jacques. The hope that he would agree to take shelter in her mother's apartment had become an obsession with her. This project, which a week earlier she would have judged unthinkable, had rooted itself so firmly in her mind that she had lost sight of its temerity; her only feeling now was one of gratitude to Jacques for having assented so promptly.

No sooner were they inside the flat than she pulled off her hat and gloves and settled down to work. Her fatigue seemed to have vanished as if by magic; she fell to making tea, tidying up Daniel's room and laying sheets on the sofa that was to be Jacques's bed.

Jacques vainly protested; finally he had to prison her wrists to stop her. "Now, my dear," he smiled. "We've had quite enough of it! Do you realize it's nearly two a.m.? I'll be gone at six. I'm going to sleep on the sofa in my clothes—if I sleep at all, which isn't very likely."

"Anyhow," she pleaded, "do let me give you a blanket."

He helped her to arrange the cushions and connect a bedside lamp with the wall-plug.

"Now," he said, "you've got to think about yourself, forget that I'm here, and sleep, sleep soundly. Promise?"

She nodded affectionately.

"Tomorrow morning," he went on, "I'll slip out quietly, without waking you. I want you to have a really long night's rest. Who knows what tomorrow has in store for us? I'll come back after lunch and give you the news."

Again she nodded.

"Good night," he said.

Standing in this room so full of vivid memories for him, he took her gently in his arms. He could feel the light pressure of her breast on his and, as he drew her closer to him, she swayed a little and their knees met. Both felt the same faint thrill, but he alone was conscious of it.

"Hold me," she sighed. "Hold me closer."

She had flung her arms round Jacques's neck and, carried away by a surge of emotion, was kissing him passionately. And the audacity of innocence made her the more reckless of the two. It was she who pressed him back toward the bed, onto which they sank, still in each other's arms.

"Hold me close," she repeated. "Closer—still closer," and to hide the emotion on her face she reached to the table and switched off the lamp.

Jacques was trying to keep control of himself, but he knew now that Jenny would not go to her room; they would spend the night together. "We too!" he thought in a flash of cruel lucidity. "We're just like all the rest!" A vague chagrin, an access of despair, came over him, mingling with his desire. But then his thoughts grew blurred in an ungovernable rapture, his breath came in quick gasps, and he clasped her in a fierce embrace that the kindly darkness redeemed.

A sudden thrill sped through his body, taking him unawares, leaving him breathless, incapable of movement. Then gradually his limbs relaxed, his breath came back. With a feeling of deliverance and a brief pang of shame as well—with a rankling sense of loneliness and regret—he came back to self-awareness.

Meanwhile Jenny remained nestling in his arms, lost in an ecstasy of love, unthinking, all fond desire that this wonderful moment should never, never end. Her cheek lay on the roughness of his coat, and the muffled beating of his heart so close to hers throbbed in her ear like the low echo of a dream. Moonlight—or was it the first pale glimmer of dawn?—was flooding through the open window, bathing the room in a milky sheen, a spectral radiance in which walls and furniture, all opaque and solid things, seemed to have suddenly become translucent. And after the tempestuous hours they had lived through together, to sleep, to sleep in each others' arms, had the glamour of a quiet landfall.

He was the first to close his eyes. She heard him murmur some faint, faltering words through a last kiss, and then with a thrill of inexpressible emotion felt him falling asleep upon her breast. For a little while she held weariness at bay, trying to keep conscious of her happiness a little longer, and when at last she too Sank into oblivion, it was with an exquisite sensation of surrendering not so much to sleep as to her lover.

# Chapter X

JACQUES woke first. For several moments, while slowly consciousness returned to him, he lay gazing with rapturous eyes at the beloved face, on whose young beauty lay but the faintest traces of the excitement and exhaustion of the day before.

The half-parted lips seemed on the verge of a smile, and on the peach-bloom smoothness of her cheeks lay, like faint strokes of an artist's brush, the frail, translucent shadows of her eyelashes: it cost him an effort not to touch that softness with his lips. Gingerly he shuffled over to the edge of the couch, and swung himself off without disturbing her repose.

As he stood up he caught sight of his reflection in the mirror—his rumpled clothes, ashen cheeks, and tousled hair. The mere possibility that she might see him in such a state sent him hurrying to the door. None the less, before leaving, he took some sprays of sweet-peas from the vase on the mantlepiece, placed them on the couch beside her, where he had been lying, then tiptoed from the room.

It was just after seven, on Saturday, August 1. A new month was beginning, the holiday-makers' month. What would it bring forth? War, revolution, or peace?

The day promised to be a fine one.

He decided to visit the baths next door to the Closerie des Lilas in the Boulevard du Montparnasse. On his way he bought the morning papers.

Several of these, the *Matin*, for instance, and the *Journal*, were printed on one sheet only. War economy already? They were packed with information for the benefit of those called to the colours—what to do in certain emergencies, and the like.

The day's issue of the *Humanité* had come out as usual. Heavily bordered in black, it gave full particulars of the outrage. Jacques was surprised to find among its contents a sympathetic letter from M. Poincaré to Jaurés's widow: "At a time when national unity is more vital than ever, it behoves me to …" As it happened, Jacques knew for a fact that *Mme.* Jaurés was out of town and that the friends of the dead leader had decided to postpone making arrangements for the funeral until she came back. Obviously, therefore, the letter had been communicated directly to the press by Poincaré himself. With what motive? Jacques wondered.

A stirring proclamation signed by Viviani on behalf of the Cabinet laid much stress on the fact that "in these anxious days Jaurés had endorsed the government's patriotic measures with his personal approval." The concluding paragraph held a discreetly veiled threat: "In the grave crisis which has befallen the nation, the government has confidence that the patriotism of the working-classes and the entire population will lead them to maintain a calm demeanour and refrain from causing further apprehension in the mind of the public by any agitation of a nature calculated to bring disorder into the life of Paris." Was the government in fear of riots? In a gossip column Jacques read that when M. Malvy, the Minister of the Interior, was apprised of the murder, at the Cabinet Council, he at once rushed of? from the council room to his own ministry so as to keep in touch with police headquarters.

All the papers, moreover, with a unanimity that suggested they were acting under orders, dwelt upon the necessity of sinking political differences, and without exception made the murder a pretext for extolling "the lead given to his Party by the great republican" and insisting on the fact that shortly before his death he had endorsed the government's action in "taking the necessary measures of precaution to meet an emergency of a most formidable nature …" Anyone reading these passages would be led to suppose that the voice now silent for ever had never been raised for any other purpose than to promote the nationalist policy of France.

The move was both a subtle and a dastardly one. Now that the adversary was laid low, it was the height of ingenuity to seize upon his dead body, to make of it a symbol of loyalty to the government, to use it as a weapon—a spearhead in the fight against the now leaderless Socialist Party. "I shouldn't be surprised if they went to the length of giving him a state funeral," Jacques muttered to himself.

The news-sheets were sodden with the steam from his bath; he rolled them up into a ball and tossed it ragefully into a corner before plunging into the tepid water.

"That being so," he said to himself, "we've got to look things squarely in the face."

Obviously the jingoists were gaining ground at such a rate that it now seemed impossible to keep up the struggle. Journalists, schoolteachers, writers, scientists, the intelligentzia—all vied with one another in adjuring their critical independence, in preaching the new crusade, inciting all to hatred of the hereditary foe, urging blind obedience, and preparing men's minds for the futile holocaust. Even in the papers of the left, the elite of the popular leaders—who only the day before were loudly proclaiming with the full weight of their authority that this monstrous struggle between the states of Europe would only be an amplification of class war on the international plane, another triumph of the fuglemen of profiteering, competition, and private ownership—all now seemed willing to put their influence at the service of the government. One or two did have the grace to make some halting reservations. "Our dream was too ambitious to come true," and so forth. But they had capitulated, one and all; they now declared that national defence was the bounden duty of all citizens and were already urging their working-class readers to co-operate with a clear conscience in the deadly work. Their collective default opened the flood-gates to a spate of patriotic propaganda and bade fair to uproot from the minds of the masses, already wavering in their allegiance, that instinct of revolt which Jacques had counted on till now as the one and only hope of preserving peace.

Yes, he reflected with a bitter sense of helplessness, they've made their preparations with diabolical skill. War is possible only with a nation wrought up to fever-pitch. First men's minds are mobilized; then it's child's-play to mobilize the men themselves. He recalled a public meeting he had once attended. Was it Jaurés, or Vandervelde, or another leader, who, addressing an audience eager for words of reassurance, had likened the individual action of each revolutionist to the cartloads of rubble which, from father to son, generations of dwellers by the sea tip out along the shore. "The sea breaks over them," he had cried. "The waves disperse each mound of dust. But every cartful leaves a small residue of heavy stones, which the sea does not sweep away. And thus the heap grows higher year by year till in the fullness of time the ridge of stones has risen to a massive breakwater on which the raging seas take no effect, a solid causeway along which future generations will march ahead triumphantly." Bold metaphors, which at the time were frantically

applauded by the audience. But, Jacques thought, when this tidal wave that's coming has swept over us, what will be left of all our paltry dikes?

But then he reproached himself for his faint-heartedness. What right had he to give way to despair? The battle's never lost so long as the best of us stand to our guns and refuse to cringe to that tyrant of the will—determinism. Events are as we shape them. We should never lose hope, whatever happens. It's up to us to fight to the end against all that saps our confidence, to sterilize the virus of collective panic. Nothing is lost as yet.

But he felt terribly alone. Alone as those who cling tenaciously to an ideal must be alone. And yet his very isolation gave him a curious feeling of security. For, whatever his distress, he knew he was right, that he was fighting for the truth, and no power on earth could make a renegade of him.

Without returning to Jenny's apartment, he hurried over to the offices of the *Humanité*. The building had the aspect of a house of mourning. Early though it was, staircases and passages were thronged with militants coming and going, but all the zeal had gone out of their faces, giving place to looks of profound dejection and distress. The murderer's name was being passed from mouth to mouth: Raoul Villain. Nobody seemed to know him. Was he of unsound mind? An agent of the nationalists? Who had incited him to the crime? When taken to the police station, he had professed himself unable to account for his act. A sheet of paper found in his pocket bore the words: "The country is in danger; let the criminals atone."

Like the rest of the staff, Stefany had stayed up all night. His cheeks were ashen pale and his beady black eyes blinked incessantly as the result of hours of weeping and a Sleepless night.

A dozen Socialists were conversing excitedly in his room.

News had come in that von Schoen, the German Ambassador, had ventured on an incredible demarche at the Quai d'Orsay, with a view to inducing France to remain neutral and withhold her military support from Russia. Germany, it was alleged, undertook in return not to make war on France, provided the French government, as a pledge for France's neutrality, would allow her to occupy the forts of Toul and Verdun during the whole of the campaign against the Russians.

A few of those present, men like Burot and Rabbe, suggested that this eleventh-hour bargaining provided a means, after all, of keeping France out of the war. But the majority somewhat unexpectedly came forward as champions of the Franco-Russian alliance. Young Jumelin, in a tone which reminded Jacques of Manuel Roy's patriotic outbursts, put in a heated protest. "It would be the first time in history that France failed to honour her signature!"

Burot promptly sprang to his feet. "Excuse me," he cried, "but I must say you're 'way off the track there! Just have a careful look at the order of events, the dates of the successive mobilizations. I'll even leave out of account what we may happen to know about the military preparations the Russians set on foot quite a while ago—secretly, of course—and have gone on with ever since, in spite of all the efforts made by France to stop them. Let's consider for the present only the official pronouncements. Well, the Tsar's ukase was signed on Thursday afternoon; he was fully aware of the solemn warning that had been given by Germany, in good time and in perfectly plain terms, that mobilization by Russia would mean war. On *Thursday*, mind you, the day before yesterday. Now Franz Josef, for his part, only signed his decree on *Friday*, that's to say, yesterday, late in the morning. Then, yesterday too, but several hours later, Germany proclaimed the *Kriegsgefahr*—which we all know is not the same thing as a general mobilization. That's the correct order of events. And the fact is no secret's made about it," he added, taking a newspaper from his pocket. "On the admission even of a government organ such as the *Matin*, the Russian general mobilization preceded the Austrian general mobilization. There's no getting around that, and it's a fact of much importance. History, I expect, will look on it as *the* decisive fact. Unquestionably Russia must be regarded as the aggressor nation. Well"—he paused for a moment, then went on in a slow, emphatic tone—' "I'm as deeply concerned as any one of you for the honour of France. But I hold that these proved facts would amply justify France, today, in withholding her support from Russia. And what's more, I hold that such a refusal to stand by the aggressor state would enable our government at long last to prove in a dramatic and decisive manner that it is not, and never has been, out for war."

There was a brief silence, and something like a sudden revival of hope.

Even Jumelin could not think of any objection to raise. But, as he was not inclined to admit that he was mistaken, he gave the discussion a new turn. "We've been talking about treaty obligations incurred by France. Have we any clear idea of what they are? Who can say what further obligations Poincaré, led on by Isvolsky, hasn't let us in for during the last two years?"

"And what was the Foreign Minister's reply?" Jacques asked. "I suppose, of course, he regarded it as being a 'trap' and turned it down? That's the line our Foreign Office always takes in such cases!"

"If not a 'trap,' " replied Cadieux, who prided himself on being well-informed, "anyhow as a veiled provocation, in fact a kind of ultimatum."

"For what purpose?"

"Obviously, to oblige France to show her hand then and there. Everybody knows the German General Staff's plan of campaign is to gain a decisive victory on the French front in the first week or so, which would then enable them to swing round their army to the eastern front. It's essential, therefore, that Germany should be able to attack France at the earliest moment. And that's why the Germans are trying to jockey France into war before actual fighting has begun on the Russo-German front."

Stefany had for some time been showing signs of restiveness. Now his strident voice cut short the discussion. "Damn it, you're all arguing as if war was already declared, or going to be declared any minute! And you are doing this just when French and German Socialists are getting into closer touch than ever before; just when the coming of Müller—he'll be here tonight—is going to give us a chance at last of taking really drastic and decisive action."

All fell silent. For an eerie moment it was as if the shade of Jaurés were hovering in the room. Stefany had used the very words the Skipper would have used. It was borne in on them that the sending to Paris of an official delegate of German social-democracy at such an hour, for the purpose of concluding a pact between the peoples despite their governments, was an unprecedented event, justifying the wildest hopes.

"What fine fellows these Germans are!" cried Jumelin. And his boyish confidence, following so closely on the pessimistic views that were being aired a moment before, was to Jacques a further proof of the confusion reigning in their minds.

The entrance of Renaudel created a diversion. His cheeks were pale and puffy and his eyes expressionless. He had spent the night keeping vigil over his friend's body. He had come to attend a hastily convened general meeting of the Socialist Federation of the

Seine, taking place that morning in the *Humanité* office. Its object was to review the situation created within the Party by the disappearance of its leader. And he wished, before the meeting, to have a talk with Stefany about an appeal just issued by the Trade Union Congress. At Lyon, at Marseille, at Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes, Rouen, and Lille—everywhere, in fact, as he averred—demonstrations were being organized. "No," he exclaimed, clenching his fists, "we mustn't give up hope!"

The little group dispersed, and Jacques, after looking in at Gallot's office and finding him away, walked downstairs to the street. Before going to see Jenny, however, he decided to call at the *Libertaire* offices to find out what was being said and done in anarchist circles.

In the Place Dancourt he ran into the Cauchois brothers, two stonemasons whom he had often met at the *Libertaire*, and they dissuaded him from going any farther.

"We've just been there. Not a soul about. All the boys have taken to cover. The cops are on the warpath. What's the use of getting nabbed?"

Jacques kept them company for a short distance. They walked ahead aimlessly. For once they had downed tools, "because of what's happening."

"What's your idea about this rotten war?" the elder of them asked. He was a big, freckled, red-haired young man, with rather coarse features; this morning his light-blue eyes had an unaccustomed gentleness.

"A fine lot he cares. He's a Swiss!" put in the younger man, who, though they were not twins, was the image of his brother—but as the finished statue resembles the rough-hewn block.

Jacques saw no point in going into details. "I'm afraid I *do* care," he said gloomily.

The youngster turned to him with a friendly smile. "Of course, of course. But it ain't the same for you; you're not up against it like we are."

The elder brother, who had no doubt been "having one or two" to celebrate his escapade, waxed talkative. "Oh, it's simple enough, what we think. We've only one skin apiece and we ain't so keen on losing it. See? I don't say we wouldn't risk our skins if we were called to fight for our ideas. See what I mean? But as for fighting for them damn 'patriots' as they call themselves, nothing doing. There's fellows who like that sort of thing, I know; well let 'em go ahead! 'You got to love your country,' they say. Well, *our* country's any place where there's a chance of doing our job in peace and quiet. Ain't that so, Jules?"

The younger man emitted a noncommittal whistle.

"Well, then," Jacques asked, "supposing they do mobilize, what are you going to do about it?" (He was thinking of his own case; the answer he had given to Antoine's question: "What exactly do *you* intend to do?" had been quite straightforward. He had no idea. All he knew was that he would struggle to the end. But where? And with whom? And in what way? He refused to let his mind dwell on it; that would be like doubting the certain victory of peace.)

The younger man shot a stealthy glance at his brother and, as though fearing he might let his tongue run away with him, made haste to put in: "Anyhow, we're not due to be called up till the ninth day. That gives us time to look around a bit."

The elder brother had failed to catch the other's warning look. He turned to Jacques and said in a low tone:

"D'you know Saillavar? A fellow with a pockmarked face. No? Well, he comes from Portbou. See what I'm getting at? He knows the Spanish frontier by heart, same as we know the streets of Menil-montant." He gave a knowing wink. "In Spain, even if there is a war, neutrality'll be the ticket, so they say. Once a fellow's there, it's all plain sailing; there's nothing to prevent a man from turning an honest penny, like anyone else. And as for work, we ain't work-shy, are we, Jules?"

The younger brother gave Jacques a suspicious glance. His blue eyes had a steely glint. He muttered: "Now don't you ever go and repeat that, Thibault!"

"No fear," said Jacques with a smile as he shook hands with them. In a brown study he watched them go; then shook his head despondently. "No," he murmured, "not that. That's not for me. To cross into a neutral country—there's something to be said for it. But if it's only to 'do your job in peace and turn an honest penny' while half the world's being butchered—no!" He took a few steps, stopped again. "Then—what?"

# Chapter XI

ANNE marched up to the telephone with a decided step. But as she was about to pick up the receiver, she paused. “I’m a fool. It’s twenty-past eleven; he’s still at the hospital. Why not go and catch him as he’s coming out? That way, he can’t escape me!”

She remembered having given her chauffeur the morning off. To save time and, all the more so, because she could not bear the thought of waiting, she snatched up her hat and gloves, ran to the door, and hailed the first taxi. “Drive to the Rue de Sevres. I’ll tell you where to stop.”

The janitor at the hospital had not seen Dr. Thibault go out yet. Anne glanced along the cars drawn up by the curb. Antoine’s was not among them. But he might very well have parked it in the hospital yard and, in any case, he did not always use his car in the morning.

She got back into the taxi and, leaning from the window, kept close watch on the people coming and going through the big gateway. Five to twelve. Noon. Twelve chimes from the hospital clock, followed after a brief pause by twelve clangs from a church near by. A stream of nurses and attendants poured forth into the street.

Suddenly a cold sweat broke out on her forehead. She had just remembered that there was another way out of the hospital, on a side-street. Quickly alighting, she hastened up it, after telling the janitor to ask Dr. Thibault to wait, should he leave by the main exit.

The narrow sidewalk seethed with a hurrying crowd, the road was full of wagons and trucks; all around her was the nerve-racking din of a busy street at rush hour. A fit of dizziness came over her, there was a buzzing in her ears, and, as she shut her eyes and halted for a moment, she caught herself thinking quite seriously: Who knows? Perhaps I’d be better dead! But at once she braced her nerves and, moving like an automaton, continued on her way to the side-entrance.

“Dr. Thibault? Yes, Madame, he’s gone. He left some minutes ago.”

Without even stopping to thank the man, she dashed away like a demented woman. What was to be done? Another telephone call? But she had called him several times yesterday in vain, and once again this morning, just after he had left the apartment—so Léon had informed her, anyway. “So early?” she had asked him incredulously, for it was only a quarter-past seven.

She went back to the janitor. “Can I use your phone? It’s urgent.”

The line was not free and she had to wait for some time. At last an answer came.

“Dr. Thibault’s out, Madame. He said he would not be back for lunch.”

Léon’s tone was studiously impersonal. Anne had come to hate the man. She could no longer bear to hear that unctuous, deferential voice which always intervened between her and her lover and deprived her of the direct, living, almost physical contact for which she pleaded helplessly over the line.

She hung up without a word and went out into the street. There’s nothing for it, she thought. I’ll go there. Then I’ll know if they are lying to me.

First she had to find her taxi again. She threaded her way through the crowd, in frantic haste, inwardly raging against this weak surrender to the passion ravaging her heart but unable to withstand it.

“4A Rue de l’Université.”

No sooner did the tall facade, the gaudy blinds, the portico of Antoine’s house, come into view at the far end of the street than abruptly panic gripped her. She had visualized Antoine rising from his luncheon-table, coming out to meet her in the hall, napkin in hand, scowling… . What could she say to him? Only “I love you, Tony!” And suddenly she was seized with fear, fear of his frowning brows and stubborn under-jaw, of the look of irritation in his eyes, that she could picture only too well… .

Why not write a letter?

“Stop at the postoffice, please—at the corner.”

She asked for a special-delivery form, scribbled a few lines.

> Tony dear, I must see you, if only for a moment. Anywhere, at any time you like. Ring me up. I’ll stay at home. I must see you, Tony dear.

That phrase had been running through her mind all day. “I must see you.” She felt sure that, could she but meet him once again, even for a minute, she would find the words to win him back.

After slipping the note into the special-delivery box, she hurried home—heartily ashamed of herself… .

Antoine was still at table when the letter arrived. Glowing with enthusiasm, Roy had been giving him a description of the chauvinist demonstration in which he had taken part the previous evening. “Yes, old man,” Antoine was saying, “I can well believe all you tell me. I’ve only too good reasons for doing so. Just now we’re indulging in an orgy of patriotism that takes one’s breath away. But—do you know what they remind me of, all those bright young friends of yours flag-wagging down the boulevards to let the world know they approve of war?”

Léon handed him the note. As he recognized the writing, a shadow fell on his face.

“They remind me of a poster that used to be seen all over Paris when I was a kid.” While he spoke he was stripping off the perforated band of the envelope, his eyes fixed on Roy. Then he glanced at the letter, tore it up at once into tiny shreds, and went on speaking. “The poster showed a flock of geese. They were making googoo eyes at a cook armed with a long, pointed kitchen-knife. And the inscription ran: ‘*Hurrah for the Strasbourg Pâté de Foie Gras!*’ ” He strewed the flakes of paper on his plate and fell silent.

No “explanation” had taken place between Anne and himself. After his talk with Simon, Antoine had quietly let Anne drop out of his life; had given up visiting her, making appointments, or even answering her phone calls. These escapist methods were unpremeditated and even went against the grain, for Antoine was all in favour of clean-cut situations. And it was his firm intention to have things out with Anne in a decisive interview, regarding which his memory was jogged effectively several times a day—every time Léon accosted him with lowered eyes and the masonic formula: “You’re wanted on the phone, sir.” But the hours passed, each

fraught with new anxieties, and in his rare spells of leisure from the calls of his profession he either plunged into a feverish perusal of the newspapers or, with morbid complaisance, let himself be drawn into confabulations with all and sundry—people who, like himself, had lost the faculty of thinking or talking about anything except war. Now and then he wondered at himself for feeling no more than a hostile indifference toward a woman whom he had no reasons to reproach and who only a week before (he was bound to admit) had still held so large a place in his life.

He supposed that his case was an exception. It did not occur to him that the same influences were everywhere at work. The storm breaking over Europe was disrupting private lives as well; human relationships founded in untruth were crumbling, falling helplessly asunder. The first gust of the tempest sweeping the world was already shaking from the boughs the tainted fruit.

# Chapter XII

JACQUES was back at Jenny's place some minutes before noon. She was not expecting him so early. Rather guiltily she confessed that she had slept soundly till nine. Since then she had been poring over the papers, trying to find out what exactly was happening in Austria. Her voice shook when she referred to her mother's plight in Vienna. Rising, she took a few steps across the room, burying her face in her hands.

He wondered how to reassure her without lying. To the burden of anxiety imposed by world events was added this frail, personal distress touching him so closely, and for a while the motives urging him to fight a losing battle in the cause of peace were reinforced by his eagerness to bring peace to Jenny's troubled mind.

"Do sit down," he said. "I can't bear to see you standing up like that, darling, looking so miserable. All is not lost yet, you know." He conjured up a heartening smile.

She asked nothing better than to believe him, and he launched out into an enthusiastic description of Stefany's indomitable hopefulness, of Müller's mission and all that might come of it. Carried away by his own words, he went so far as to suggest with all but unfeigned fervour: "Who knows? Perhaps it's a good thing the whole world has been led to the brink of this catastrophe! For it may well bring about that vast change of public opinion which is what we're aiming at.

"Yes!" Jenny cried, her eyes intent on his.

Then again her nerves got the better of her; she went to the window and began fidgeting with the blind. So abrupt were her gestures that the cord snapped in her hand.

He went up to her, put his arm round her shoulders, and pressed her to him. "Now, dear, keep calm—no, don't look away. You can't imagine the good it does me being with you! I've come here to take breath a little, to get a new lease of energy. And I need your help. I need all your *confidence*."

Jenny's expression changed at once; she smiled bravely up at him.

"Splendid! Now, put on your hat and we'll go out and have some lunch."

"Why not have lunch here?" The cheerfulness in her voice took him by surprise, so unforced it seemed. "Please say Yes.' I've some eggs and peaches in the pantry, and we can drink tea."

He smiled assent.

Gaily she ran to the kitchen and lit the gas-range. Jacques followed and, momentarily forgetting his anxieties, watched her laying the table, alining knives and forks and spoons, neatly disposing pats of butter in the butter-dish—with the application that all women with the housekeeping instinct bring to the most trivial domestic rites. How supple and spontaneous were her least gestures! Love had weaned her from her stiffness, set free that womanly grace which until now some secret inhibition had held in leash.

"Our first meal at home!" she remarked with a certain earnestness, while placing the eggs on the table.

They sat at opposite ends of the table, and it was as if they had faced each other thus for years. She was in high spirits, which he did his best to reciprocate, but the look of care remained. Seeing her steal a furtive glance at him, he smiled. "It's awfully nice here."

"Isn't it!" she cried enthusiastically, and added: "We need each other more than ever in times like these."

Suddenly he thought of the days to come, and panic gripped his heart. He could not meet her eyes.

For some reason they could not shake off the silent mood that had enveloped them. Now and again Jacques's eyes rested on Jenny in a long, lingering gaze of tenderness and, unable to find words to express his feelings, he reached across the table and pressed her hand for a few moments.

His moodiness distressed her. During these last days a change had been coming over her; for the first time, despite the studied reticence that had become second nature with her, she would have welcomed a chance of talking about herself. The hours she spent alone were one long, silent monologue addressed to Jacques, in which she dissected her character and laid bare to him unflinchingly her faults, her capacities, and her limitations. For she was obsessed by the dread that he had formed a wrong opinion of her and would be horribly disappointed later on when he came to know her better.

When they had eaten their dessert, she had him fold his napkin and handed him Daniel's napkin-ring. Then, taking his arm, as she had used to take Daniel's, she led him back to her room.

The drawing-room door was ajar, and as they passed it Jacques caught sight of the piano lit up by a sunbeam and, seized by a sudden fancy, halted.

"Jenny, please play for me that—that piece, you know the one I mean. The one you played—that evening."

"What was it?" She knew quite well what he meant, but this abrupt recall of their summer at Maisons-Laffitte had played havoc with her composure. Then, "Oh, Jacques!" she cried. "Not—not today!"

"Please …!"

She yielded, entered the room, seated herself at the piano, and, haunted by memories of one of the most emotionally tragic evenings of her life, began playing Chopin's Third Etude.

Jacques moved behind her so as to be out of her sight and stood there in a coign of shadow, with folded arms. His eyes fast shut to veil his tears, his heart melting with remembered rapture, he heard the song of infinite joy, infinite regret, rise trembling on the silence. When the last note was played she rose, stepped back, and leaned against him.

"Forgive me," he whispered in her ear. Never before had she heard such an extremity of anguish in his voice.

"Why?" she asked in alarm.

"We might have been so happy, you and I, and since so long …"

A tremor shook her body. Quickly she laid her hand upon his lips. She drew him gently to the open window and out onto the balcony. Below, the treetops wove a close-set canopy of green above the avenue, and from it rose now and again, like the twittering of a flight of sparrows, the merry voices of unseen children. In the distance the foliage of the Luxembourg Gardens was already taking on the faintly burnished sheen that precedes by a few weeks the russet panoply of autumn.

Jacques gazed with unseeing eyes at the sunbright panorama. His obsession had returned and he was thinking that Müller must have just left Brussels.

Then he heard Jenny saying in a low, pensive tone: "I know every tree. And I know every seat beneath those trees, every line of every statue. My whole childhood's linked up with that garden." After a short pause she added: "I like remembering things—do you?"

"No, I don't," he answered bluntly.

She turned and gazed at him, suddenly abashed. "Neither does Daniel." There was a hint of disapproval in her voice.

Feeling he must explain his words, Jacques brought himself to say: "For me the past is past. Each day I've lived through drops into oblivion; I've always kept my eyes turned toward the future."

The remark wounded her more cruelly than she dared tell. The present meant so little to her, and the future nothing; memories were the focus of her inner life.

"You can't mean it, Jacques! You say that just to make yourself seem different from others."

"Different from others?"

"No," Jenny caught herself up, blushing, "that's not what I meant… ." She pondered for some moments. "Don't you sometimes feel a desire to—to mystify people? Not just for the joy of baffling them, of course, but so as to slip through their fingers. Isn't that so?"

"What do you mean by 'to slip through their fingers'?" He thought it over, then confessed: "Well, perhaps you're right. I must say I loathe feeling that people have a cut-and-dried opinion of me. It's as if they tried to pin me down, to circumscribe my mind. And I dare say I do sometimes mystify people deliberately—just to prevent their pinning me down in that way."

It struck him that Jenny had compelled him to take stock of himself—as he certainly would not have done on his own initiative. Now he felt grateful to her, and no less angry with himself for having wounded her by professing a cheap scorn for the sentimentalities of memory. His arm tightened round her waist.

"I hurt you just now. I'm sorry; I talked like a fool. Naturally times like these play the devil with one's nerves!" He smiled. "And now, to excuse my stupidity a bit, shall we say that Jenny is a little girl who's … extraordinarily sensitive?"

"Yes, that's true," she replied at once. "I'm disgustingly sensitive." After a moment's thought she added: "Thin-skinned—but not a bit good at heart!"

Jacques gave an incredulous smile.

"It's true," she said. "I know myself only too well. Every time I do something that makes me seem kind-hearted, I do it deliberately, after thinking it over—as an act of duty. I haven't a scrap of natural, spontaneous kindness—the only kindess that counts. Mother's, for instance." She was on the point of adding: "And yours, too, Jacques," but kept silent.

He shot her a puzzled glance. He had an impression that some aspect of her had matured with surprising suddenness. Never did she seem to him so puzzling as when she analysed herself aloud. At such moments her face grew set and hard and her eyes steely, and Jacques had a feeling he was losing contact, that she had turned to stone: an obdurate, enigmatic, sphinxlike Jenny whose secrecy galled his masculine self-esteem.

In a low voice he said: "Jenny, you remind me of an island, a sunny smiling island—but quite inaccessible!"

She gave a start. "Why do you say that? It's not fair!"

A cold, dank air seemed to blow between them, chilling her blood. For some moments they stood in silence, leaning on the balcony rail, their minds estranged, lost in dark forebodings… . Then two slow, distant chimes sounded from the Senate clock. Jacques glanced at his watch and straightened up.

"It's two." His obsession had returned to him. "Müller is on his way."

They went back into the apartment. He had not suggested she should accompany him, and she, too, had said nothing about it. Yet he was not at all surprised—so natural did it seem—when she called to him as she ran into her room.

"Just a moment, dear, and I'll be with you."

Jacques decided this time to take Jenny with him into the *Humanité* building. On one of the landings they met Rabbe, and Jacques's first question was what arrangements had been made for meeting the German delegate and when his train came in. At five o'clock, Rabbe said, adding that all Socialist members had been convened to meet him in one of the reception-rooms of the Chamber of Deputies at six o'clock. It was expected that, by reason of its crucial importance, this conference would go on well into the night.

"We're all going to meet him at the Gare du Nord," the old militant announced.

"We'll go there too," Jacques said, turning to Jenny.

The mere name of the railway-station had suddenly evoked in her mind a picture, clear in every detail, of her encounter there with Jacques, her flight along the passages of the subway, their talk in the little garden beside the church. Naively convinced that the same thoughts had risen in Jacques's mind, she turned and looked at him. But he was engrossed in conversation with Rabbe, asking what resolutions had been passed that morning at the meeting of the Socialist Federation.

"None!" old Rabbe growled indignantly. "The committee broke up without having come to any decision. The Party's leaderless now."

The various departments of the newspaper were humming with activity. In Gallot's room Pagès, Cadieux, and others were engaged in a discussion. A rumour had gone round that, ever since the German declaration of *Kriegsgefahr*, the French General Staff had been pestering the government to issue orders for mobilization without more ado, and it was only a matter of hours. Pagès went further and, on the authority of an army clerk employed in General Joffre's office, stated that the order in council had actually been signed by Poincaré at noon. But Cadieux, who had just returned from the Foreign Office, declared that the news must be false. "Else I'd be sure to have heard of it," he boasted.

He said that the chief topic of conversation at the Foreign Office just now was the attitude of England. According to him, Caillaux and some other politicians of his group intended to ask the French Socialist leaders to approach Keir Hardie, with a view to getting the English Socialist Party to retract its insistence on British neutrality. Meanwhile, he said, Poincaré had taken it on himself to write directly to King George V, urging the necessity of England's declaring herself on the side of France, since in British intervention lay the last hope of preserving peace.

"When did Poincaré send the letter?" Jacques inquired.

"Yesterday."

"Exactly! When he knew that the Russian mobilization had been officially announced and war had become inevitable."

No one challenged the statement.

A communiqué, presumably official, had been issued in the course of the morning to the effect that the French and British General Staffs were keeping in close touch and "a plan of action had been drawn up." Was military action meant? Anyhow, there was good authority for the report that the British Admiralty had ordered the fleet to patrol the Straits of Dover, that merchant ships were prohibited from entering the naval bases, the forts commanding these bases had been manned at full war strength, and that the coastal lighthouses had been forbidden to light up that night.

Marc Levoir came in. According to him, another interview had taken place between Viviani and von Schoen. The former had said: "Germany's mobilizing; we know it." When the Ambassador made no reply, Viviani had added (so Levoir's informant told him): "Our attitude is necessarily dictated by that of Germany. Nevertheless, to prove to the world our resolute desire to avert a war, General Joffre has issued orders to our troops to withdraw to a minimum distance of ten kilometres from the frontier. Thus if any 'incident' occurs, it will be none of our making."

Pagès, who had friends in the War Office, made haste to qualify this statement. He asserted that the withdrawal from the frontier had no real significance; as a concession to the cause of peace it was more window-dressing, for it did not interfere in any way with the plan of campaign drawn up by the French General Staff. In certain ministerial circles, so Pagès said, they made no secret of the fact that this temporary retirement was no more than a piece of skilful diplomatic tactics, a device for impressing European opinion —above all, British opinion.

"I'm quite ready to believe," Jacques said, "that *one* of their ideas is to enlist the sympathy of England. But personally I think it's *we*, the pacifists of France, whom they are getting at in the first instance. They're out to cut the ground from under our feet, to trade on our feelings, and have us think their hands are clean of war-guilt. Also, it's an honourable pretext they're affording us for sinking our scruples and collaborating with the powers that be, now they've shown themselves so peacefully inclined. Yes, I can guess already what we'll be reading tomorrow in the opposition press."

Indifferent to the talk going on around him, Gallot had continued sorting out a pile of documents stacked on the table. Now, more hedgehoglike than ever, perking up his head behind the paper rampart, he said: "And what proves it is the mighty hurry the government was in to inform the leaders of the Party about this move—before they'd even made it."

His peevish tone, taken with his insignificant appearance—puny arms and legs, and the look of a petty bureaucrat with a chronic cold in the head—tended to make him sound unconvincing, even when eminently right. Just now, Jacques noticed, indignation had not quelled in his eyes their look of profound sadness, which lent pathos to the face for all its ugliness.

A group of young militants burst in. A report had just gone round that the League of Patriots had organized a procession which was heading for the Place de la Concorde, for a demonstration in front of the Strasbourg statue.

"Shall we go?" Pagès asked.

Everyone was already on his feet. As a matter of fact they seemed less eager to engage in a bout with their adversaries than to snatch at an opportunity for doing something at last.

Jenny had a feeling that Jacques was intent on accompanying them, but holding back on her account.

"Let's go there," she said resolutely.

# Chapter XIII

SUNLIGHT, dulled by a sultry haze but fierce as ever, beat down on people's heads, raising the temperature in the heart of Paris to furnace-heat. More and more perturbed, and wrought up like flies by the thunder in the air, the populace seemed unable to quit the streets. The police were busy trying, without recourse to violence, to disperse the excited crowds that had gathered outside banks, police stations, and municipal buildings. The yells of newspaper-venders, piercing the low-pitched clamour of the streets, rasped nerves already strained to breaking-point.

At the Place des Pyramides the plinth of Joan of Arc's statue was heaped with flowers, like a catafalque. The arcades in the Rue de Rivoli were densely thronged with people hurrying in both directions. Most shops had their shutters down. The traffic in the street was as thick as at the height of the shopping-season. The Tuileries Gardens, however, were deserted but for a detachment of mounted police drawn up under the trees; as the horses stirred, glossy flanks and burnished helmets dappled the green shade with sudden gleams.

Evidently the news of the projected demonstration was incorrect, for nothing unusual was happening in the Place de la Concorde. The traffic had not been diverted, and only a rather small police cordon barred the approaches to the Strasbourg statue, which, too, was banked with wreaths ribboned in the national colours.

Regretfully the little band of *Humanité* stalwarts dispersed.

Jacques and Jenny turned up the crowded Rue Royale. "It's half-past four," Jacques said. "Let's go and see Müller arrive. If you're not too tired, we might walk along the boulevards to the Gare du Nord."

Suddenly, as they were walking past the Madeleine, a jangled clamour broke out overhead; the big church bell was tolling, rending the air with its punctual, solemnly reiterated clang.

All the people in the street stopped dead, exchanging puzzled glances, then, with one accord, began running blindly forward.

"What is it?" Jenny cried apprehensively—Jacques had gripped her by the arm. "What ever is happening?"

Someone beside them muttered: "It's come!"

Near and far, other belfries were giving tongue; Saint Augustin's, Saint Louis d'Antin's, Saint Roch's, the Holy Assumption. And soon the louring sky seemed like a dome of bronze lugubriously tolling in every quadrant, to the same stubborn rhythm, the passing-bell of a generation.

"What ever is happening?" Jenny asked again. "Where are they all running?"

Without a word, Jacques drew her onto the roadway across which hundreds of people were flocking, regardless of the traffic.

A steadily increasing crowd was massing on the far side, in front of the Madeleine postoffice. A slip of white paper had just been pasted on the window from the inside. But Jacques and Jenny were too far away to read it. They heard people round them exclaiming: "It's come!" Those in the front rows stood for some moments peering up at the notice in a sort of dazed absorption, as if they were laboriously spelling it out. When presently they turned their heads, their eyes were aghast, their faces haggard, clammy with sweat. Some, without a word, without a glance for anyone, forced their way through the group and made off, their chins sagging on their chests. Others shook their heads mournfully and with misted eyes searched the faces round them for a look of fellow-feeling; then, after murmuring some desultory phrases which met with no response, tore themselves reluctantly away.

At last Jacques and Jenny worked their way up to the window. A small rectangular sheet was fixed to the pane by four pink seals; on it was an inscription in an impersonal copperplate script, a woman's handwriting, neatly underscored with a ruler:

GENERAL MOBILIZATION

The First Day of Mobilization Is
Sunday, August 2

Jenny pressed to her breast the hand that Jacques had slipped beneath her arm. He stood stock-still, thinking like all the rest: "Well, it's come!" Then other thoughts came racing through his mind and with them a sense of wonder at feeling so little distress. Had it not been for the bells pounding their tocsin on his brain, he might have felt a certain relaxation of the nerves—like the physical relief that presently, after the long day of brooding storm, would come with the first drops of rain. A spurious respite that lasted for only a second or two, the respite of the wounded man who at the first shock is not aware that he is injured. But after a moment the wound opens, begins to bleed, and pain comes into its own; Jacques felt a stab of anguish pierce his heart. He clenched his jaws, but Jenny heard him give a hoarse groan.

"Jacques, oh, Jacques …!"

He would not speak. He let her lead him away from the crowd, to an empty bench at the sidewalk's edge. They sat down in silence. People were still flocking up to the postoffice window and, over the seething mass of heads, stared at the fateful slip of paper, unable to take their eyes off it.

So it had come to this! For weeks he had lived in a fool's paradise, fondly trusting that justice, truth, and man's fraternity would triumph in the nick of time. His attitude had been, not that of the visionary expecting a miracle, but that of the scientist awaiting the results of an infallible experiment. And now—his world had tumbled about his ears. A cold, disdainful rage swept over him. Never had he felt so mortified. Not so much outraged or discouraged, as baffled and humiliated—humiliated by the masses' feebleness of purpose, by the incurable futility of human nature, the ineffectiveness of reason. And I, he thought, what am *I* to do now? In a vivid rush of introspection he explored the secret places of his heart, the hinterlands of consciousness, trying to find a clue, a presage, the glimmer of a guiding light. In vain. And, with the knowledge of his helplessness, something like panic came upon him.

Jenny deferred to his silent mood. Without speaking, with mingled curiosity and dread, she watched the scene around her. She had only the vaguest ideas of what was meant by mobilization or, for that matter, war. Yet her thoughts had harked at once to her mother

and Daniel, but principally to Jacques. Still, she lacked imagination to picture with any clearness what war might mean for these three loved ones.

When at last she spoke, her whispered question was an echo of Jacques's thoughts. "What are you going to do?"

Her voice was calm, unshaken. Jacques found himself thinking: How splendidly she's facing it! But he was too cast down to reply. He averted his eyes, and mopped his perspiring forehead. At last he rose from the bench. "We may as well go to the station, I suppose."

All afternoon, huddled in an easy-chair beside the telephone, Anne had been hoping in vain for a call from Antoine. Time and again her hand strayed toward the receiver, but, though her nerves were overwrought, she had kept to her resolve not to ring up first but wait for him to call her. A newspaper lay at her feet. What she had read in glancing through it had exasperated her. What did it matter to her, this nonsense about Austria, Russia, Germany! Fanatically absorbed in her own troubles, she kept on picturing the scene she meant to have with Antoine once they were together in their little room. And each time the picture rose before her she eked it out with fresh details, thought up new things to say, fiercer and fiercer taunts to hurl at him—with a sense of momentary relief. And then, suddenly, her anger subsided, she begged him to forgive her, flung her arms round him, drew him toward the bed.

A door banged near by, there was a sound of hurrying feet. Instinctively she glanced at the clock; twenty to five. The door opened and her maid rushed in.

"Oh, ma'am, Joe says they've just put up the mobilization orders at the postoffice. There's going to be a war."

"Really?" Anne drawled. She repeated to herself: "There's going to be a war," without fully grasping what it meant. First came an irritating thought: "Simon will be coming back." Then: "They'll send him to the front—and a good riddance!" Suddenly her mind went dark with horror. "My God, if there's a war, Tony will have to go! He'll be killed." She sprang up from the chair. "Get me my hat, gloves. Quick now! Send for the car!"

In the glass above the fireplace she caught sight of her reflected self: peaked nostrils, crow's-feet. No, she thought despairingly, I'm looking really too hideous today!

When the maid returned, Anne was sitting again in the armchair, hunched forward, her hands locked between her knees. Without straightening up, she said gently: "Thanks, Justine, but I've changed my mind. Tell Joe I shan't want him. Get a bath ready, please. Very hot. And make the bed; I'll try to rest a bit."

A few minutes later she was lying in the twilight of her bedroom. The curtains were drawn. The telephone was within reach; if he called, she had only to stretch out an arm. Yes, bed was the best place; cool, soft sheets were the best anodyne for her distress. Obviously, she could not expect to feel really well all at once; it would need half an hour or so for her pulse to steady down, the fever to die from her blood, a gentle drowsiness to numb her brain. Only—what an appalling, impossible effort was needed to lie quite still, with fast-shut eyes, without a flutter of the eyelids, waiting, waiting! … Tony! … War! … Ah, if only she could see him again, win him back! …

She jumped out of bed, and ran stumblingly, barefooted, to her boudoir, pressing her hands to her face. Without troubling to draw up a chair, she knelt on the carpet beside the desk, snatched a sheet of paper from the rack, and scribbled frantically:

> I can't bear it any longer, Tony. I'm suffering too dreadfully. I can't bear it. You may have to go. When? You've cut me out of your life. Why? What have I done? Tony dear, I *must* see you. Tonight. At our place. I'll be waiting for you there all evening, all night. Come at your own time. Only—do please come. I've *got* to see you again. Promise that you'll come. Please, *please* come, my Tony.

She rang for the maid. "Ask Joe to take this note immediately. Tell him to deliver it himself at Dr. Thibault's apartment."

It struck her then that Simon might well have taken the morning train, in which case he might be turning up at any moment. She dressed rapidly, and left the house.

To steady her nerves she forced herself to go all the way on foot, her impatience notwithstanding, to their apartment in the Avenue de Wagram. Though she could not have given a reason for it, she was sure, this time, that Antoine would come.

She entered "their place" by the private door in the side-street. Just as she was turning the key in the lock she sensed that he was there, and smiled to herself, so convinced was she of her clairvoyance. Closing the door soundlessly, she tiptoed across the rooms, the doors of which stood open, and called in a low voice: "Tony! Tony!" But the bedroom was empty. Obviously he had heard her and was hiding in the bathroom! She ran into the bathroom, into the kitchen, then wearily dragged herself back to the bedroom and sank onto the bed.

Antoine had not come yet—but, "He will come," she murmured.

Slowly she undressed. First she took off her shoes, then with a long, swift, sliding gesture—like the peeling of a fruit—stripped off her stockings, laying bare the smoothness of her skin. Thinking she heard footsteps, she looked round. No, he had not come yet. Her eyes slowly roved about the room and settled on the bed. One of her delights was to wake early in the morning and at her leisure pore over the beloved face, the unwrinkled forehead, the lightly parted lips relaxed in slumber with all the harshness gone out of them, gentle as the lips of a child. Only at such moments did she feel that he was truly hers. "*My Tony*!" Well, he was coming to her now. She was certain, absolutely certain. He would come tonight.

She was not mistaken.

# Chapter XIV

THE Gare du Nord was under military occupation. At every turn one came on red-trousered groups and pyramids of piled arms; ticket-offices and station yard echoed with words of command, the clatter of rifle-butts. Civilians, however, were allowed to enter, and Jacques had no trouble in making his way, accompanied by Jenny, to the platform.

Some sixty members of the militant left wing had come to meet the train. Each, as he greeted a comrade, muttered the now familiar epitaph of peace—"Well, it's come!"—with an angry toss of the head and, clenching his fists, exchanged a look of indignation with his friend. But under this too easily controlled violence one could already discern symptoms of fatalistic resignation, as if all were thinking: "It was *bound to come!*"

"What would the Skipper have made of all this?" old Rabbe sighed, after shaking Jacques's hand in silence. "What would he have done?"

"I expect great things of the conference with Muller." Jacques sounded confident enough; he had pledged himself to hopefulness, and stood by his resolve.

At the far end of the platform a small, isolated knot of men stood apart from the rest: the delegation of Socialist deputies.

Followed by Jenny and Rabbe, Jacques made his way past the various groups, without joining any. With a far-away look, like one speaking in a dream, he murmured: "I'm thinking of the man who's coming to us from Germany at this most tragic hour and of all the terrible responsibilities he may well have to shoulder. When he left Berlin the day before yesterday, he had no idea of the turn events would take. Then, stage by stage, on his journey toward Paris he learned of the Russian mobilization, the Austrian mobilization, the *Kriegsgejahrzustand* and—this morning—of Jaurés's assassination. And now, when he alights from the train, he'll be told that France is mobilizing. And, as the last straw, he'll probably be told tonight that orders for general mobilization have been issued in Germany as well. It's appalling!"

When at last the engine loomed up across a haze of vapour, driving billows of steam before it, a ripple of excitement passed down the crowd waiting on the platform; with one accord, all moved forward. But the station staff were evidently on the lookout for this; lining up at once, they stemmed the rush, allowing only the parliamentary delegation to proceed.

Jacques saw them gather outside a car, on the running-board of which two men were standing. One he recognized at once as Hermann Müller. The other, whom he did not know, was a well-built, youngish man with a determined-looking face which gave an impression of energy and straightforwardness. Jacques turned to Rabbe. "Who's the man with Müller?"

"Henri de Man, a Belgian. A very fine fellow, with no nonsense about him. The sort of fellow who uses his brains and never knows when he's beaten. Didn't you see him in Brussels on Wednesday? He speaks German perfectly, as well as French, and he's probably going to act as interpreter."

Jenny laid her hand on Jacques's arm. "Look! They're letting people through now."

They hastened toward the official group, but a flood of outgoing passengers barred the way, and when they had managed to get past the platform barrier, the parliamentary deputation whose task it was to take Müller at once to their private conference at the Chamber was already out of sight.

In the ticket-offices a number of people were gathered round a notice that had just been posted. It was headed in block letters: "REGULATIONS APPLYING TO ALIENS."

Someone behind them gave an ironical guffaw. "Looks like our people weren't caught napping, anyway! They must've had these notices all printed in advance."

Jenny looked around. The speaker was a young workman in blue overalls, a cigarette between his lips. A pair of stout, brand-new, hobnailed boots dangled across his shoulder.

"You too!" a bystander remarked, pointing to the boots. "You weren't caught napping, either!"

"Right," the workman chuckled as he moved away. "Them boots is going to give old Kaiser Bill one in his fat German ass!"

There was a burst of laughter… . Jacques had not stirred; his eyes were fixed on the notice, his fingers tensely gripping Jenny's elbow. Now with the other hand he pointed to a paragraph printed in heavy type:

> Aliens, without distinction of nationality, are permitted to leave the fortified area of Paris up to the close of the first day of mobilization. They will be required, on leaving, to produce their identity papers for examination by the railway police authorities.

A host of thoughts were coursing through his brain. "*Aliens* …!" The parcel he had left at Jenny's apartment still contained the false passport that had served for the Berlin adventure. Even if he produced his certificate of exemption from military service, issued in his right name, he might well have trouble getting through to Switzerland as a French subject. Whereas there should be nothing to hinder the Genevan student Eberlé from returning to his country before "the close of the first day of mobilization"—tomorrow, Sunday.

And suddenly he thought: What's to become of Jenny if I leave before tomorrow night?

He had put his arm round her shoulders and was guiding her out of the crowd. "Listen," he said abruptly, "I've absolutely got to go and see my brother."

Jenny had scrupulously read the passage in heavy type beginning: "Aliens …" But what, she wondered, was there to make Jacques suddenly so upset, and why should he be in such a hurry to see Antoine?

Jacques himself could hardly have explained his motive. It was to Antoine that his first thought had turned when he heard the great bell at the Madeleine sounding the alarm. And now, on seeing that notice, across the chaos of his thoughts, he had suddenly grown aware of an urgent, irrational desire to see his brother again.

Jenny had no mind to question him. This railway-station and all this relatively unfamiliar part of Paris were associated for her with that eventful evening when she had seen Daniel off and with her panic flight from Jacques; and the flood of memories had overwhelmed her.

In an hour's time the look of the city had changed considerably. There were as many people about, if not more, but no loiterers. Everyone they saw was in a hurry, intent solely on his own concerns. It was as if each passer-by had suddenly discovered a host of problems to be solved without delay, arrangements to be made, a job to be handed over, friends and relatives to visit, an eleventh-hour reconciliation to essay, or a rupture to be consummated. Their eyes fixed on the ground, with tight-set lips and troubled faces, all were hurrying along, swarming out across the roadway, dodging and doubling through the traffic, which had perceptibly diminished. There were very few taxis, most drivers having garaged their cars and gone home at once. Buses had ceased running; public conveyances of all kinds had been requisitioned as from that evening.

It was a struggle for Jenny to keep up with Jacques, but she did her best to hide it. Like everyone else, he was hurrying ahead, his face tense, his chin well forward, as if escaping from some dread pursuer. Though she had no inkling of his thoughts, she guessed that he was grappling with some inner problem.

In point of fact the sight of the mobilization order had crystallized certain ideas which had been floating in his mind and of which till now he had been almost unaware. A sudden memory of the Pilot had flickered into his consciousness as he had seen him in the bedroom in the Brussels hotel, in blue pyjamas, with haggard eyes, standing in front of a mound of ashes in the grate. He had had no news since Thursday last; often he had wondered what Meynestrel was doing over there. Up to his ears, no doubt, in revolutionary work. "Aliens are permitted to leave Paris… ." In Geneva, at the Pilot's side, he would find a group of energetic men who had kept intact their loyalties, their single-mindedness. He pictured Richardley and Mithoerg and the others as a dauntless phalanx, an islet of resistance in the midst of Europe under arms. The temptation to hurry back to Switzerland was strong. Yet he could not make up his mind. Was it on Jenny's account? he asked himself. Yes—but Jenny was not the real cause of his irresolution. Had he any qualms about being a "deserter"? None whatever; on the contrary, his first duty was to refuse to serve in defence of all that he had never ceased to loathe and fight against. No, what galled him was the thought of scuttling to cover while others took their chance of death. He knew that he could never feel at peace with himself unless in standing out he took personal risks equivalent to those his brothers under arms were bound to take. What, then, should he do? Give up the idea of seeking refuge in a neutral country and remain in France? But how make active war on war, defy the warlords, in a country under martial law, where every form of pacifist propaganda would be ruthlessly suppressed, where he would be suspected, watched by the police, and perhaps thrown into prison to keep him muzzled? Unthinkable! What, then? Obviously Switzerland was the solution, but what was he to do there?

"Merely to be oneself is nothing!" he exclaimed vehemently. Then he caught Jenny's puzzled look and added: "Being oneself, thinking this or that, believing this or that, is futile. Futile, so long as one can't transmute one's life and thoughts and faith into *acts*."

"Into acts?" She had an impression that she had misheard him; almost necessarily, what he meant lay outside her range.

"This is what I think," he went on in the same harsh, emphatic tone. "I think that this war is going to hold up the internationalist ideal for many years to come. For many, many years; perhaps for generations. Well, if there were some definite act that could be done to save our ideal from this momentary setback, I'd do it—even if it were an act of sheer despair. But *what* act?" he muttered despondently.

Jenny halted abruptly. "Jacques! You're going away!" Seeing his eyes fixed on her, she added: "You're going to Geneva, aren't you?"

He gave a vague nod.

She was torn between conflicting feelings, joy and distress. If, she thought, he goes to Switzerland, he'll be safe. But how shall I live without him?

"If I do leave Paris," Jacques said, "it will be to go to Geneva. For one thing, that's the only place where one can still try to get something under way. For another thing, I've a false passport which makes it easy for me to go back to Switzerland… . You saw what that notice said?"

She broke in eagerly. "Go, Jacques! Start tomorrow!"

The firmness in her voice took his breath away.

"Tomorrow?"

She could not stifle a little thrill of hope; his tone had seemed to imply: "No; presently perhaps, but not tomorrow."

Jacques had started walking again. Her legs seemed giving way beneath her, and she had to cling to his arm.

"I'll leave tomorrow," he said at last, "if—if you'll come with me."

A rapturous tremor shook her body; the cloud of anxiety had miraculously lifted. He was going away—he was saved! And she was going with him; they were not to part!

Jacques fancied she was hesitating. "You're free, aren't you," he said, "with your mother unable to leave Vienna?"

Her only answer was to press herself more closely to him. Her heart was pounding away, she could feel its pulses throbbing in her temples, her head was swimming. She was his, body and soul. They would never part again. She would be always at his side, shielding him from danger.

Soon they were chattering about their departure as if it had been arranged long in advance. Jacques had forgotten the exact time the night express left for Switzerland, but there was sure to be a timetable at Antoine's place. Then they would have to find out if Jenny could travel without a passport; the regulations would surely be less strict for women. Next, they discussed the cost of their tickets; between them they would have enough and to spare, and in Geneva, Jacques assured her, he could "manage." Of course, he reminded her, everything still depended on the outcome of the pourparlers with the German delegate. Who could tell? Supposing suddenly, at the last moment, the proletariat of both countries decided to launch an insurrection …?

They had come to the Tuileries Gardens without noticing where they were going. Jenny was streaming with perspiration; she felt her muscles suddenly go limp. Timidly she pointed to a bench hidden away among the flowers. They sat down. They had the place to themselves. The storm which had been brooding all the afternoon seemed to keep down the scent of the flowers to the ground-level.

Jenny thought: I'll be able to write to Mamma from Switzerland. And as it's a neutral country, she'll be able to come and join us there… . Already she was picturing her home-to-be in Geneva, with her mother restored to her and Jacques immune from danger.

Jacques's thoughts were turning in the same dreary circle. Obviously he must leave France. But—to do what? Try as he might to stake his hopes on Meynestrel and persuade himself that in Geneva, anyhow, the spirit of revolution was still intact and active, he could not help recalling the Talking Shop or overcome his doubts as to the real efficacy of the tasks that would be assigned to him once he was there.

Unable to sit still any longer, he said: "Come on, Jenny. You'll be able to have a rest at my brother's place."

She gave him a startled look.

"Of course you must come," he smiled.

"What? To your brother's place? Don't you think …?"

"Oh, what does anything matter now? And, anyhow, Antoine had better know… ."

He seemed so sure of himself, so determined, that she made no further protest and followed him submissively.

# Chapter XV

IN THE hall lay an officer's uniform-case, brand-new, the price-ticket still attached.

"The doctor's in, sir," Léon said as he opened the door of the consulting-room.

Jenny entered without hesitation. There was silence in the room. Jacques saw his brother standing at his desk. His first impression was that Antoine was by himself; then, to his disappointment, he espied Studler and Roy rising from the large armchairs in which they had been entrenched, Roy's at the window and Studler's some way off, beside the bookshelves. Antoine was sorting out papers; the wastepaper-basket under the desk was full, and scraps of torn paper littered the carpet.

He went up to Jenny and shook her hand paternally, with no indication of surprise. That day no one was surprised at anything. Moreover, he remembered that *Mme.* de Fontanin, in the note she had sent after Jerome's funeral to thank him for his visits to the hospital, had mentioned that she was going away. He assumed that Jenny, left by herself in Paris, had come to ask him for advice; probably she had run into Jacques on the staircase.

As the two brothers' glances met, the rush of affectionate emotion that came over both showed itself only in a vague, quick smile, no more than friendly in appearance but charged with undertones of feeling. For, despite all that estranged them, never had they felt so near in spirit to each other; not even at their father's deathbed had they been so vividly aware of the mysterious response of blood to blood. They shook hands in silence.

Antoine, after drawing forward a chair for Jenny, had begun to ask her about her mother's journey, when the door opened. Dr. Thérivier entered, accompanied by Jousselin. The former went straight up to Antoine. "Well, it's come! And we can't do a thing about it!"

Antoine did not reply at once. His look was earnest, almost calm. "No, we can't do anything about it," he repeated slowly. Then he smiled, for it was exactly what he thought himself, and the thought was a rowel to his energy.

Antoine had been in Jousselin's laboratory when young Roy had burst in with the news of mobilization. He had not flinched; had coolly lit a cigarette. For three days now he had felt no longer a free agent, bat an atom caught in the flux of world events, helpless as a pebble in a load of gravel dropped by a dump-cart upon the roadside. All his world lay in ruins—his career, his plans, the life he had mapped out so precisely for himself. Yet at this moment he felt solidly at one with his country and his class. Before him lay the unknown. The unknown; but action too. And this prospect, with all its stirring possibilities, had promptly given him new heart to face the future. He had a way of never protesting for long against what could not be mended, the inescapable. An obstacle for him was a new datum, posing a new problem to be solved. And, to his thinking, there was no obstacle that might not, if a man rose to the occasion, be used as stepping-stone to further progress.

"When do you join up?" Thérivier inquired.

"Tomorrow morning, at Compiègne. What about you?"

"The day after, Monday, at Chalons." He turned to Studler, who had joined them. "How about you?" Good humour was so much a second nature with Thérivier that even today his voice sounded cheerful and his plump, red-cheeked, bearded face had a jovial expression. But the apprehension in his eyes made a painful contrast with it.

"How about me?" The Caliph's eyelashes fluttered. The question seemed to have roused him from a dream. He turned toward Jacques as if it were to him that explanations were due. "I'm off, too," he growled. "But a week later. I'm to report at Evreux."

Jacques refrained from looking at him. He did not blame the Caliph, whose life, he knew, had been one long series of self-immolations. And he knew, too, that by consenting to serve, against his convictions, in this "defensive" war, this man, the soul of loyalty, was obeying once again what he believed to be the call of duty.

Jacques's eyes, roving about the room in quest of Jenny, discovered her standing a little apart from the others beside the fireplace. She seemed quite self-possessed, but in a brown study. Presently he saw her straighten up, look round for a chair, take a few steps, and sit down. How lithe she is! he thought, and for an ecstatic moment fancied he was still holding her in his arms. He remembered her sudden, quickly repressed shudder when he had kissed her for the first time. And his senses tingled with a fond delight that he made no effort to restrain. Their eyes met; he smiled, and felt the colour rising to his cheeks.

Antoine, who had gone up to Jenny, was making inquiries about Daniel when Thérivier broke into their conversation. "Say, Thibault, how are they going to replace you at the hospital? What arrangements are being made?"

"The older men are being asked to return to duty. At our place Adrien, Daumas, and even that old stickin-the-mud Deléry have undertaken to replace the younger men." Suddenly he pointed an accusing finger at Thérivier. "Look here, you rascal! You've never brought back the notes that Jousselin lent you the other day—the ones about 'Vegetable Growths and Glossoptosism.' "

With a laugh Thérivier called Jenny to witness. "He's incorrigible! All right, I'll send back your precious manuscripts to Studler. So you can go on service with your mind at rest, my budding medical officer!"

One of the windows stood open on the street and through it for some moments sounds had been coming in of singing, shouting, clattering horse-hoofs. There was a general move toward the window and, taking the opportunity, Jacques went up to his brother, who had stayed behind in the middle of the room. But just then Antoine started across to join the others and Jacques followed him.

A company of artillery coming from the Invalides had just encountered a procession of Italian demonstrators marching up the Rue des Saints-Pères, preceded by four drums and a flag. The Italians had halted and were singing the "Marseillaise" and cheering the troops. The drums were beating; the noise grew deafening.

Antoine closed the window and for a moment remained lost in thought, his forehead pressed to the pane. Jacques stayed beside him. The others had gone back to the middle of the room.

"I had a letter from England this morning," Antoine said, without moving his head.

"From England?"

"Yes. From Gise."

"Oh!" Jacques shot a quick glance at Jenny.

"She wrote on Wednesday. She wants to know what to do if there's a war. I'll tell her to stay over there, at the convent. That's the best thing she can do, don't you think so?"

Jacques nodded vaguely. Then he looked around to see if the others were out of earshot. He wanted to speak of Jenny and was fumbling for an opening when Antoine turned abruptly and gazed at him. A look of deep anxiety had settled on his face. Under his breath he murmured: "Are you still quite de-determined to …?"

"Yes." Jacques's tone was firm but devoid of any self-assertiveness.

Antoine was still bending forward, shunning his brother's eyes, nervously tapping the windowpane to the rhythm of the drum-beats receding up the street. He was aware that he had just stammered, always a symptom with him of profound disquiet.

From the hall came Léon's voice, announcing: "Dr. Philip."

Antoine drew himself erect at once, and a swift change came over his expression.

Philip's lanky, shambling form loomed in the doorway. His twinkling gaze surveyed the room and settled on Antoine. He was wagging his head lugubriously. Drawing a handkerchief from his flapping coat-tails, he mopped his brow.

Antoine had gone up to him. "Well, Chief, it's come!"

Philip touched his hand limply, without a word; then, like a marionette whose strings are suddenly let go, he seemed to crumple up onto the nearest seat he could find—the end of the settee, already swathed in slip-covers.

"When're you leaving?" he asked in his curt, wheezy voice.

"Tomorrow morning, Chief."

Philip's lips emitted a watery little click as if he were sucking a lozenge.

"I've just come from the hospital," Antoine remarked to break the silence. "Everything's been fixed up. I've turned things over to Bruhel."

There was a pause. His eyes fixed on the carpet, Philip was shaking his head in an odd manner. "I suppose you realize, my dear boy," he said at last, "that 'it' may last a long time, many years in fact."

"A good many experts," Antoine ventured to observe, though his tone lacked assurance, "maintain the contrary view."

"Do they?" Philip snorted, as if he had long since made up his mind about experts and their forecasts. "All of them base their notions on cut-and-dried theories about food-supplies, credit, and so on. But suppose the governments in power are mad enough to stake their last penny and risk utter ruin rather than give in! After what we've been witnessing during the past week, anything's possible. No, personally I foresee a very long war in which all the nations involved will wear themselves out and none will have the desire, or even the ability, to call a halt."

After a short pause, he spoke again. "Really, the whole thing passes my understanding. Who'd have believed that such a thing as this war was possible today? Yet all that was needed, it seems, was for the press to persist in fogging the issues in people's minds, with the result that no one now has any clear idea who is and who isn't the aggressor, and every nation fancies its 'honour' is at stake. A week of imbecile scare-mongering, bluster, and exaggeration has been enough to set all the nations of Europe at each other's throats, like a band of lunatics, yelling blue murder! Yes, the whole thing passes my understanding. It's like the tragedy of Oedipus. He, too, was forewarned. But when, on the day fixed by destiny, the alarming events which had been predicted took place, he failed to recognize them. It's the same with us. Our prophets had foretold everything; we knew exactly where the danger lay—in the Balkans, in Austria, in Tsarism and Pan-Germanism. We were forewarned. We were on the watch. Many sensible people did everything they could to stave off disaster. And yet—it's come! We couldn't escape it. Why? I keep on turning the question over in my own mind: Why? Perhaps the answer is that among the events we had dreaded and expected, some small unforeseen factor crept in, the merest trifle, just enough to modify their aspect and of a sudden make them unrecognizable. Just enough to enable fate to spring its trap, despite men's vigilance. And now we're caught in it!"

At the far end of the room Jousselin, Thérivier, Jacques, and Jenny were sitting in a group round Manuel Roy. His cheerful, boyish laugh rang out. "Oh, come now!" he cried to Thérivier. "You don't expect me to start wailing about it, do you? After these stuffy labs, a breath of clean, fresh air will be a vast relief. We're going to live through exciting times!"

"To *live?*" Jousselin murmured.

Jenny, who had been gazing at Roy, averted her eyes; the look of exaltation on the young man's face distressed her.

Philip, who had caught the remark, turned to Antoine. "Young folk can't imagine what it's like. And that explains a lot. I'm different; I went through the 1870 war. Young folk don't know."

He took out his handkerchief again, passed it over his cheeks, lips, and beard, then dabbed his palms with it.

"You younger men are going to the front," he said in a low, brooding tone. "I suppose you think that old men like me are lucky to be out of it. You're wrong. Our lot is even worse than yours. Because our lives are ended."

"Ended?"

"Yes, my dear boy. Over and done with. July 1914 marks the end of something of which we formed part; a new era is beginning—in which we don't 'belong.' "

Antoine gazed at him affectionately, but could find no answer.

Philip fell silent. Then, as if tickled by some joke that had just crossed his mind, he gave a little reedy chuckle. "I've had three black moments in my career," he began, in the prim, carefully enunciated tones he employed in the lecture-room and which led his pupils to say of him: "Old Sawbones is listening to the sound of his own voice." "The first changed the whole course of my youth; the second bowled me over in my middle years; the third, I can see, will play the devil with my old age."

Antoine's look was an invitation to his old friend to explain himself.

"The first was when the pious, provincial-minded youngster I was then found out one night, after reading the four Gospels in succession, that they were a tissue of inconsistencies. The second was when I realized that a certain poisonous fellow named Esterhazy had done a piece of dirty work known as the Dreyfus *bordereau*, and that instead of punishing the culprit the French authorities were torturing a wretched man whose only crime was to have been born a Jew."

"And the third," Antoine put in with a melancholy smile, "is, o£ course, today."

"No, it came a week ago, when the papers published the text of the ultimatum, and I saw the billiard-stroke that was being prepared for, a cannon to be made at the expense of millions of lives."

"A 'cannon'? I don't follow, Chief!"

Under the bushy brows Philip's eyes twinkled with almost cruel irony. "Yes, Thibault, a cannon that was the foulest of foul strokes. There was a red ball, Servia, hit by a white ball, Austria, which in its turn had been hit by the cue ball—that's to say Germany. Who held the cue? Russia? Or was it England?" He gave vent to his rageful, whinnying laugh. "I'd like to know the truth before I die."

Jacques came up to the corner where Antoine and Philip were sitting.

"Chief," Antoine said, "I've introduced my brother to you already, I think?"

The old doctor shot a keen glance at Jacques.

Jacques bowed, then turned to Antoine. "Have a timetable anywhere handy?" "Yes." Their eyes met. A question hovered on the tip of Antoine's tongue, but he merely pointed, saying: "Over there. Under the telephone directory."

"And when are you joining your regiment?" Philip inquired.

Jacques stiffened, hesitated, and cast a glance at Antoine, who stammered hastily:

"Oh, my b-brother—it's—er—not—in his line."

A short silence followed.

Had Philip understood? Did he remember the conversation he had had with Jacques? He gazed at the young man with extreme interest and, as Jacques moved away, followed him with his eyes.

Antoine bent toward Philip. "My brother refuses on principle to serve in the army."

Philip reflected for a moment. Then, "All forms of idealism are legitimate," he said in a weary voice.

"No," Antoine interrupted. "In times like these a man's duty is perfectly simple, clear as daylight. No one has the right to back out of it."

Philip, who did not seem to have heard him, went on speaking in his nasal drone. "Legitimate and perhaps necessary. Could humanity progress without mystical beliefs? Read your history again, Thibault. No great social change has ever come about without some religious aspiration underlying it. Intelligence can but lead to inactivity. It's faith that supplies the driving-force to get things done and the persistence men need for carrying on with the good work."

Antoine said nothing; in the Chief's company he automatically became the docile pupil once again. Then he noticed Jenny standing by the fireplace beside Jacques, studying the timetable. It surprised him for a moment; then he assumed that she must be looking up the trains by which her mother might return from Austria.

Philip, meanwhile, had continued voicing his reflections.

"Who knows, Thibault? Perhaps those who think like your brother are forerunners. Perhaps this war's a necessary evil, an upheaval of this Old World that will throw up a crop of new half-truths of which we have no inkling. It would be pleasant to think so, anyway. And why not? All the nations of Europe will be compelled to fling their resources, material and spiritual, lock, stock, and barrel, into the melting-pot of war. It's an unprecedented phenomenon, and we can't foresee what will come of it. Who knows? Perhaps the whole structure of our civilization will come out of the crucible recast in a new form. Yes, men have some terrible experiences to go through before the dawn of enlightenment—the day when they're content humbly to avail themselves of what science has to tell them for the ordering of their lives on earth."

Léon's clownish face peeped in at the half-opened door. "You're wanted, sir." Antoine scowled, but rose from his seat. "Excuse me a minute, Chief."

Léon stood waiting in the hall. Imperturbably as usual he held out the letter-tray, on which lay a blue envelope.

Antoine picked it up and thrust it into his pocket without opening it.

"The person wants to know if there's an answer," the valet murmured, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"What person?"

"The chauffeur, sir."

"No," Antoine said, turning on his heel. He had just heard the door behind him open. Jacques and Jenny entered the hall.

"What? Are you off?"

"Yes," Jacques replied in the same curt, peremptory tone that Antoine had used a moment before when saying "No" to Léon. He gazed fixedly at his brother and in his eyes there was a veiled reproach, a look that seemed to say: "So when we come to see you on a day like this, you can't find a moment to give us!"

Antoine said awkwardly: "Already? And you, Madamoiselle, have you, too, got to leave now?" His thoughts moved quickly: if Jenny had come to ask for his advice or help, why was she hurrying off without mentioning it—and with Jacques?

He ventured on a direct question. "Can I do anything for you before I go?"

Jenny's only answer was a slight movement of her head and a smile that might mean anything. Completely at a loss, he turned to Jacques, who was moving deliberately toward the hall-door. "And you, Jacques? Shan't I see you again?"

The note of affection in his voice made Jenny raise her eyes quickly and Jacques swing round. And his look betrayed such emotion that Jacques forgot his grievance. "Are you leaving tomorrow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"Very early. I'll have to be out of the apartment by seven."

Jacques glanced at Jenny, then said rather gruffly: "Shall I come and call for you then?"

Antoine's face lit up. "Yes, do! Be here at seven. Will you come and see me off at the station?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, old man." He gazed tenderly at his brother and repeated: "Thanks."

They were all three beside the hall-door. Jacques opened it for Jenny and crossed the threshold without meeting his brother's eyes. From the landing he said in a low voice: "Good-bye, then, till tomorrow,", and drew the door shut behind him.

Suddenly he changed his mind. "Go down without me," he said to Jenny. "I'll meet you in the street." Hastily he thumped the door with his fist.

Antoine was still in the hall. He went back to the door and opened it. Jacques came in alone, closing the front door after him. "There's something I want to tell you." His eyes were fixed on the floor.

Antoine guessed it was something important. “Come,” he said, leading the way to the small study.

Jacques followed in silence. When the door was closed, he leaned against it, facing his brother. “You’ve got to know it, Antoine. Jenny and I came here together to tell you.”

“What’s that? Jenny *and* you?”

“Yes,” Jacques said firmly, with a curious smile.

Antoine was utterly bewildered. “But look here, what do you mean? Jenny and you!”

“It goes back to years ago.” The words came out hastily, in rapid jerks, and Jacques felt his colour rising. “But it’s been settled only now. During the last week.”

“What’s been settled?” Antoine backed to the sofa, sat down. “No, look here—you don’t mean that seriously, do you? You and Jenny …?”

“It’s true.”

“But you hardly know each other. And then—as things are now … getting engaged when we’re on the brink … does it mean you’ve given up the idea of leaving France?”

“No. I’m leaving tomorrow night—for Switzerland.” After a short pause he added: “With her.”

“With her? But, Jacques, you must be mad! Stark, staring mad!”

Jacques was still smiling. “Not a bit of it! It’s quite simple: we love each other.”

“Oh, don’t talk such nonsense!” Antoine exclaimed, casting discretion to the winds.

Jacques gave an angry laugh. He was cut to the quick by his brother’s attitude. “I daresay it surprises you that people can have feelings of that sort; no doubt you disapprove of them. So much the worse … for you! I only wanted to let you know. Well, I’ve done it. So—*au revoir*.”

“Wait!” Antoine cried. “It’s absurd. I can’t let you go away with your head full of silly notions like that.”

“*Au revoir*.”

“No. It’s my turn to speak and I’ve something to say to you.”

“What’s the use? I’m beginning to think we’ll never be able to understand each other.”

He had begun moving toward the door, but something held him back. There was a short silence.

Antoine made an effort to regain his self-control. “Listen, Jacques. Let’s talk seriously.” An ironical smile curled Jacques’s lips. “There are two things to take into account. One’s your temperament. The other is the moment that you’ve chosen for—for acting in this way. Well, let’s take your temperament to begin with, the sort of man you are. Let me tell you the plain truth; you’re fundamentally incapable of making anyone happy. Even in other circumstances, you’d never have been able to give Jenny a happy life.”

Jacques shrugged derisively.

“No, let me have my say. Even in other circumstances. But less than ever at the present moment, what with the war and—and your ideas! What are you going to do, what future lies before you? No one can say, but it won’t bear thinking of. Well, if you choose to run such risks, that’s your lookout. But how can you link up another person’s life with yours at such a moment? It’s a monstrous thing to do, and you should know it! Only, you’ve lost your head. You’ve given way to a childish fancy that won’t stand a moment’s scrutiny.”

Jacques gave a cackle of pert, insolent laughter that stopped short abruptly. There had been overtones of hatred, almost of madness, in its sound. Then he tossed back his forelock, folded his arms, and burst out ragefully: “So that’s how it is! I come to you to tell you of our happiness—and that is all you can find to say!” Again his shoulders lifted in a disdainful gesture. Then, holding the doorknob, he turned and flung out over his shoulder: “I used to think I knew you. It’s only in the last five minutes I’ve come to know the sort of man you really are. Yes, I’ve found you out! You’ve a heart of stone. You’ve never loved, and you never will love anybody. A heart of stone that nothing, nothing will ever bring to life.” He gazed down on his brother, scornfully surveying him from the proud aerie of his inviolable love. Then, with a tight smile, forcing out the words, he added: “Do you know what you really are—you with all your diplomas, all your pride? You’re a poor creature, Antoine. No more than that: a poor, pitiable creature.”

He gave a short, quickly suppressed laugh, and went out, banging the door behind him.

Antoine remained for a while with bowed back, staring at the carpet. Then, “A heart of stone!” he murmured half aloud.

His breath was coming in quick gasps, and the tumult of his blood gave him a physical discomfort like the dizziness brought on by a high altitude. He held his arm out in front of him; it was trembling uncontrollably. “My pulse must be a hundred and twenty,” he thought.

Slowly he straightened his shoulders and stood up; then, going to the window, threw back the shutters.

No sound came from the courtyard, beyond which, pent between two grey walls, the yellowing foliage of a chestnut tree made a patch of colour. But Antoine saw nothing of it; the foreground of his sight was all a picture of Jacques’s face, truculent, twisted in a supercilious smile, and his eyes ablaze with sullen rancour.

“You’ve never loved,” he muttered to himself, clenching his fingers on the iron balustrade. “Well, if that’s what love means, you damned young fool, you’re right: I’ve never loved. And I’m proud of it!”

A girl appeared at one of the windows of the adjoining building and looked up at him. Had he spoken out loud? Leaving the window, he went back to the middle of the room.

“Love! Country folk, anyhow, aren’t, afraid of calling a spade a spade; they say an animal’s ‘in heat.’ But that would be too simple for our young friends—and too humiliating. So it’s got to be romanticized. You’re expected to roll your eyes to heaven in a sort of swoon. ‘We love each other. I adore you. Sweetheart mine!’ The ‘heart,’ of course, is the specialty of your devout lover. As for me, I’ve a heart of stone. Be it so! And, naturally, ‘I can’t understand.’ The same old story; the priggish craving all these people have to pose as being ‘misunderstood.’ It glorifies them in their own eyes. Like madmen; yes, exactly like mental cases. Every lunatic prides himself on being misunderstood.”

He caught sight of himself in the mirror, waving his arms, glaring at an unseen foe. He thrust his hands into his pockets and fell to searching for some loftier pretext for his indignation.

“It’s the *silliness* of it all that makes me see red. Yes, that’s what rubs me on the raw—the outrage to my common sense. Now that I think of it, I’ve noticed it before: a wound inflicted on one’s common sense can sting like a whitlow.”

The thought of Philip waiting in the consulting-room helped him to steady his nerves. Squaring his shoulders, he made a move toward the door.

He grew aware that his fingers were nervously crushing some paper in his pocket. Anne's letter. He took it out, tore it in two, and dropped the pieces into the wastepaper-basket. His eyes fell on his military service-book laid out on his desk. And suddenly his mind stopped and stood still. Tomorrow—war, the risks of war; perhaps mutilation, death! "You've never loved." Tomorrow the chapter of his youth would be closed untimely; perhaps the hour of love would be past for ever.

Stooping over the wastepaper-basket, he fished up half the letter and unfolded it. Words pitiful as a broken cry, tender and passionate as a caress.

Tonight. At our place. I'll be waiting … to see you again. Promise that you'll come. Please, *please* come, my Tony.

He sank heavily into an armchair, his mind in a turmoil. For the last time, to feel her body nestling against his, her fondling hands; for the last time, the last, to fall asleep, slip into oblivion, in her arms! Then suddenly a wild regret, a black wave of despair, swept over him. He rested his elbows on the table and for some minutes sobbed like a child, his hands pressed to his cheeks.

# Chapter XVI

PARIS was in calm, if tragic mood. The clouds which had been gathering since noon formed a grey dome overhead, plunging the city into twilight gloom. Prematurely lighted, restaurants and shops cast livid trails of light across the sombre streets, where crowds of excited people, deprived of the usual means of conveyance, were hurrying in all directions. Subway stations were being mobbed, queues of waiting passengers filling the passages and overflowing onto the sidewalk; it took a full half-hour to get down to the platforms.

Abandoning their intention of travelling by subway, Jacques and Jenny started on foot across Paris.

Newspaper-venders, posted at every street corner, were doing a rushing trade in special editions. Each buyer of a paper stopped for a moment and ran eager eyes over it before going on his way. For each was secretly hoping against hope to read in it the news that European statesmen had suddenly come to their senses and found a peaceful way out; that the world had got over its preposterous nightmare with nothing worse than a bad scare.

At the *Humanité* offices, as in most Paris offices since mobilization orders had come out, no one was to be found. Vestibule and staircases were empty. The solitary office-boy on duty was pacing up and down the hall; he told Jacques that Stefany was not in his room. Current business was being dispatched by Gallot, but he had closed his door against all visitors, so as to prepare the next day's issue. Jacques and Jenny—who, exhausted though she was, kept to him like his shadow—did not venture to disturb him.

"Let's go to the Progrès," Jacques said.

In the ground-floor room of the restaurant nobody was about. Even the proprietor was away; his wife, seated at the cash-desk, looked as if she had been crying and took no notice of Jacques's entry.

They went up to the mezzanine. The only people there were some young militants, none of whom Jacques knew, grouped round one of the tables. At the entrance of the newcomers they fell silent for a minute or so, then all at once resumed their talk.

Jacques was thirsty. He installed Jenny in a seat beside the door and went down to get a bottle of beer.

"And what else d'you propose to do, fathead?-Wait for the police to come, and get yourself shot like a goddamned fool?" The speaker was a youth of twenty-five, pink-cheeked, with a cap thrown well back on his head. His hard jet-black eyes settled on each of his friends in turn as he spoke. "Anyhow"—there was an undertone of excitement in the coarse, harsh voice—"anyhow, don't you forget this! For fellows like us who've followed the whole show pretty closely, there's one thing clear, and it's the only thing that matters. *Our* country, anyhow, wasn't out for war, and *we* have nothing on our conscience."

"But that's exactly what all the others are saying!" the eldest of the group put in. He was a man in the forties, wearing the uniform of a subway employee.

"The Germans can't say as much, anyway! They've had a dozen chances in the last couple of weeks of preventing a war, and not one of 'em did they take!"

"What about us? We only had to tell them Russkys straight from the shoulder: 'You go to hell! We ain't going to back you.' "

"That wouldn't have changed anything. It's plain as can be today that them Boches had their dirty little game all planned out in advance. The bastards were spoiling for a war; well, that's their funeral. We're all for peace, sure enough, but we ain't bloody cowards, not we! France is being attacked; well, France has got to defend herself. And France means you and me and all the rest of us."

All but the subway employee seemed to agree with him.

Jacques cast a despondent glance at Jenny. A memory came to him of Studler's remark: "I've *got* to believe, I *must* convince myself of the guilt of Germany." Without drinking his beer, he rose, beckoning to Jenny. But, before going out, he went up to the group at the other table.

"A defensive war! A war that's forced upon us! A just war! Don't you realize they're throwing dust in our eyes—as they've always done? Are you, too, going to let yourself be fooled? It's only three hours since the mobilization order came out, and you're backing down already! You're giving way to those brutal passions that the press has been working up to fever-pitch for the last week, passions that the army leaders will exploit to the utmost! Who'll stand up against this wave of madness if even Socialists like you give in?"

He did not address any particular member of the group, but his gaze fell on each in turn. His lips were quivering.

The youngest, a plasterer whose cheeks and hair were still smeared with white, perked up a birdlike face toward Jacques. "I think the same like old Chataignier here," he announced in a brisk, determined tone. "I'm ordered to join up tomorrow, the first day. I've no use for war, not me. But I'm a Frenchman and France is being attacked. My country needs me, and I got to go. I may hate it like hell, but I got to go."

"Same here," said the young man beside him. "I join up on Tuesday, the third day. I come from Bar-le-Duc and my old folks are living there yet. Well, I don't want to see my hometown taken over by them Germans."

Jacques thought: "Nine Frenchmen out of ten are like that today. Eager to exculpate their country and convince themselves that their enemies have foisted this war on them—so as to justify the reactions of their combative instinct. And as a matter of fact one can't help wondering if young fellows like these don't get a sort of gloomy satisfaction out of suddenly feeling at one with an outraged nation, breathing the heady atmosphere of collective hatred." And it struck him that nothing had changed since the days when Cardinal de Retz made bold to write: "Nothing is of greater consequence in handling a nation than to make it appear to them, even when one attacks, that one has only self-defence in mind."

He addressed the young men again in a low, mournful voice. "Anyhow, please think it over! If you throw in your hand now, tomorrow it will be too late. Don't forget that on the other side of the frontier it's exactly the same as it is here: hatred, lies, and blind, unreasoning hostility. Every nation has become like those young hooligans who scrap like tiger-cats just for scrapping's sake and blame it on to the other fellow. '*He* started it!' Isn't it too ridiculous?"

"Then what the hell …?" the plasterer growled. "Fellows like us that's mobilized, what do you want us to do?"

"If you think that violence and justice are two different things, if you think that human life is sacred, if you think there aren't two kinds of morality—one that condemns murder in peacetime and another that insists on it in wartime—refuse to let yourselves be

mobilized. Keep out of the war! Be loyal to yourselves—and to the International!"

Jenny, who had been standing at the door, made a sudden move, and came and stood beside him.

The plasterer had risen. Folding his arms, he retorted indignantly: "To get myself stood up against a wall and shot like a dog? No, sir, nothing doing! Anyhow, at the front a fellow has a chance; with a little luck he saves his skin."

"But," Jacques cried, "can't you see how cowardly it is to shirk your personal responsibility, to let other people, just because they're stronger, decide for you? You tell yourself: 'I disapprove, but I can't do anything about it.' It goes against the grain, but you salve your conscience easily enough with the thought that it's a Struggle for you to submit, yet it's the decent thing to do. But can't you see you've been bamboozled by a gang of criminals? Have you forgotten that governments aren't put in power just to tyrannize over their subjects and send them to the slaughter, but to serve, to protect them, to give them happy lives?"

A swarthy-faced man in the thirties, who had said nothing so far, banged the table with his fist. "No, I tell you! You're wrong there. None of that's true today. God knows I've never truckled to the authorities. I'm as good a Socialist as you. I've five years' Party membership behind me. Well, Socialist as I am, I'm ready to shoulder my rifle and stand by the government." Jacques made as if to put in a word, but the man raised his voice. "Just now 'convictions' are neither here nor there. Nationalists, capitalists, all the big boys—we'll see about 'em later. And when it comes to settling their hash, I'll take a hand in it, don't you worry! But just now isn't the time for ideals and all that. We got to settle up with them Fritzes, first of all. Those swine are out for a war. Well, let 'em have one! And, take my word, I'll do my bit to make 'em regret the day they started it!"

Jacques turned away with a vague gesture of resignation; there was nothing to be done here. Taking Jenny's arm, he drew her toward the staircase.

"Still—socialism for ever!" a voice cried behind them… .

In the street they walked in silence for a few minutes. Distant rumblings heralded a storm; the sky was black as ink.

"It's a curious thing," Jacques said, "I've always believed—I've said it dozens of times—that wars have nothing to do with emotion, that they're inevitably due to a clash of conflicting economic interests. Well, when I see today how every class of society, without distinction, has worked itself up so easily into a patriotic frenzy, I'm almost beginning to wonder if wars aren't, rather, the result of some instinctive, uncontrollable upsurge of emotions and if the conflict of interests isn't merely a pretext for letting the instincts have their run." He broke off, letting his thoughts run on before he spoke again. "And the most grotesque thing of all is the need they feel, not only to justify themselves, but to proclaim that if they've given in they've done so for good reasons and of their own accord! Their own accord! All these poor wretches who yesterday were fighting doggedly to stave off a war and now are dragged into it against their will are resolutely putting up a show of acting on their own initiative." Again he paused before continuing. "It's positively tragic that all these shrewd, sharp-witted men should suddenly become so gullible once their patriotic emotions are played on. Tragic and almost incomprehensible. Perhaps it's simply this: the average man identifies himself unthinkingly with *his* country, his nation, and his government. He gets into the habit of saying: 'We Frenchmen …' or 'We Germans… .' And, as each individual genuinely desires peace, it's impossible for him to admit that his country is out for war. Almost one might say that the more a man is keen on peace, the more inclined he is to exonerate his country and his countrymen and the easier it is to convince him that all the provocations come from the foreigner; that his government isn't to blame and he belongs to a community which is being victimized, and that if he fights for it he's acting in self-defence."

He stopped abruptly; big drops of rain were beginning to fall, and they were crossing the open square facing the Bourse.

"Run for it!" he cried. "You'll get soaked through!"

They reached the arcades of the Rue des Colonnes just in time. The storm that had been threatening all day had broken with dramatic suddenness and violence. The flashes were continuous, nerve-shattering; crashes of thunder rolled their long reverberations between the lofty buildings with the incessant din of a storm in the high mountains. Along the Rue du 4 Septembre a detachment of mounted police trotted past, the riders crouching under the downpour over their steaming horses' necks, while spray flashed up under the horse-hoofs and, as in a lurid battlepiece, helmets glistened under a sullen sky.

"Let's go over there," Jacques suggested, pointing to a dark, already crowded little restaurant under the arcades. "We can have something to eat while we wait."

After some trouble they found two adjoining empty places in the ring of occupied seats around a marble-topped table.

No sooner was Jenny seated than she felt herself collapsing with fatigue; her knees were trembling, her back and shoulders aching, and her head weighed like a lump of lead. For a moment she fancied she was going to be sick. If only she could lie down, close her eyes, snatch a few minutes' sleep—delicious sleep, nestling in his arms! Suddenly a memory of the previous night swept over her, and with it came a swift access of energy. Jacques had noticed nothing. She saw his face in profile, the lock of dark hair, shot with glints of red, falling across his forehead. She came near gripping his arm and saying: "Let's go home. What does all the rest matter? Take me in your arms, hold me, clasp me to your breast!"

All the people round them were engaged in animated conversation, their eyes sparkling with excitement, exchanging fraternal glances as they passed each other salt-cellar or mustard-pot. The wildest, most contradictory rumours were being bandied about with serene assurance and swallowed without a qualm. "What a dreadful storm! Let's only hope it doesn't hold up our attack!" sighed a middle-aged lady, her lobster-red face glowing with combative, if vicarious, patriotism. "In 1870," put in a fat man opposite Jenny, wearing the Légion d'Honneur rosette on his lapel, "the actual fighting didn't start till long after war was declared, at least two weeks after." "I hear," someone remarked, "there'll be a shortage of sugar." "And of salt," added the heroic lady. Turning to Jenny, she whispered in a confidential tone: "I saw it coming, and I've taken my precautions, if you know what I mean, my dear."

The fat man with the rosette, addressing the company at large, launched out into a story he had heard about a colonel in a frontier regiment. His voice was vibrant with an emotion that seemed to act contagiously on his hearers. The gallant colonel, it seemed, on receiving the order to march his men back ten kilometres from the frontier, had taken it to mean that France was flinching before the enemy; preferring death to dishonour, he had blown his brains out in the presence of his regiment.

At the end of the table a workman was eating his meal in silence. Warily his eyes roved the table before settling on Jacques. Then he began speaking in an angry tone. "That's all very fine and big, for the rest of you. But where do we come in, eh? When we went to draw our wages at the shop this evening, they wouldn't pay us—not a sou!"

"That's tough luck!" observed the resetted gentleman. "Why?"

“Seems, from what the boss says, that all the money’s in a bank, and the bank’s shut. We raised Cain about it, you bet! But there wasn’t nothing to be done. ‘Come back Monday,’ says he.”

“Of course,” the red-faced lady reassured him, “you’ll all get paid on Monday.”

“Monday’s neither here nor there. A lot of my pals is joining up tomorrow. And that means they got to leave their wives and kids without a penny.”

“There’s no need to worry,” said the wearer of the rosette in the tone of one who knows his subject. “The government has made provision for that, as for all other war emergencies. Distributions are going to be made at all the town halls. Our men can feel quite easy about the families they leave behind; the state will look after them. They won’t go short of anything.”

“Eh? Is that so?” the workman muttered, obviously impressed. “Then why didn’t they tell us about it?”

A man beside Jacques who had managed to procure a copy of the late special edition of an evening paper, mentioned Poincaré’s message “To the French People.”

“Let’s see it!” Eager hands were stretched toward him, but the man would not part with his treasure-trove.

“Read it out, then!” commanded the gentleman with the rosette.

The owner of the paper, a weasel-faced little man, settled his glasses on his nose. “It’s signed by every member of the Cabinet,” he announced dramatically, then began reading in a high-pitched voice. “ ‘Alive to our responsibilities, and aware that, were we to take no steps to meet the present emergency, we should be failing in our most sacred duties, we have issued the orders which it has rendered imperative.’ ” He paused to take breath. “ ‘Mobilization does not necessarily mean war.’ ”

“Do you hear, Jacques?” Jenny breathed, with a flutter of sudden hope.

Jacques shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. “It’s a trick for getting the mice into the trap. But, once he’s got them in, he’ll see they stay there.”

“ ‘On the contrary,’ ” the shrill voice continued, “ ‘under the present circumstances, mobilization seems the best means of ensuring peace with honour.’ ”

All, including those at neighbouring tables, were now listening in silence.

“Louder!” someone called from the end of the room. The man who was reading rose to his feet. And now, as he read on, his voice at whiles broke with emotion; there was something comic and pathetic in the little man’s evident illusion that it was he himself who at this moment was addressing France. Solemnly he repeated: “ ‘Peace with honour. The government counts on our valiant nation to keep its self-command and not give way to unjustified emotion.’ ”

“Bravo!” cried the red-cheeked lady.

“ ‘Unjustified’!” Jacques muttered.

“ ‘We rely on the loyalty of every Frenchman, knowing full well not one of us will fail the call of duty. The hour of party politics is over. For us today nothing counts but France, immortal France, peace-loving, indomitable France; the land of right and justice, a nation standing shoulder to shoulder in dauntless calm, in vigilance and dignity.’ ”

When the man ceased reading, there ensued a long, tense silence. Then, fired by the exalting theme, everyone began speaking at once. The middle-aged lady’s heroism was not an exceptional phenomenon. The man facing Jenny had gone scarlet as his rosette, and the eyes of the workman who had not been paid had filled with tears. Each had yielded with a sort of rapture to the collective enthusiasm, agreeably lifted above his workaday self, dazed with sublimity, braced up to welcome a martyr’s death.

Jacques kept silent. He was picturing the very similar declarations that at the same hour had presumably been signed in other lands, by leaders of the other nations, by the Kaiser and the Tsar. In every country, he mused, those spellbinding phrases are charged with the same power; everywhere they evoke the same ridiculous frenzies of devotion.

He noticed that Jenny had pushed away her plate of soup almost untasted. Making a sign to her, he rose.

The rain had ceased, though drops were still falling from balconies. Torrents of muddy water were swirling along the gutters and plunging with loud gurglings dokyn the drains. People had come out of shelter and the glistening sidewalks were thronged as before the storm with aimlessly hurrying crowds.

“Now let’s go to the Chamber of Deputies,” Jacques said, feverishly dragging Jenny along beside him. “I wonder what they’re up to there with Muller.”

Even now, preposterous as it might seem, he could not have affirmed that he had lost all hope.

# Chapter XVII

UNOBTRUSIVE watch was kept over the Palais-Bourbon by the municipal guards. Alongside the railings enclosing the outer court, however, groups of men were standing about and toward these Jacques made his way, accompanied by Jenny.

In one of the groups, under the light streaming down from the arc-lamps, he had glimpsed Rabbe's tall figure. "The conversations are still under way," the old militant explained. "They've just come out, on their way to dinner. The discussion will be resumed presently. But not here; at the offices of the *Humanité* "

"Well? What are the first impressions?"

"None too good. But it's mighty hard to get to know anything. They were all red in the face, half dead for want of a drink, and kept strictly mum. The only one at all approachable was Siblot, and he made no attempt to hide his disappointment. Isn't that so?" he added, turning to Jumelin, who was coming up.

Jenny scrutinized the two men in silence. Jumelin's looks displeased her. The long, lean face, sallow and perspiring, the beardless, abnormally prominent jaw, the way he had of speaking in short, abrupt phrases without opening his mouth sufficiently, the square shoulders, the hard glitter of the small jet-black eyes, made the girl uncomfortable. Old Rabbe, on the contrary, with his gnarled forehead and the limpid, melancholy gaze, which always rested on Jacques with fatherly affection, greatly appealed to her; she felt he could be trusted.

"That fellow Müller doesn't seem to have any definite instructions," Jumelin observed. "He brings us no firm offer of any kind."

"If that's so, what was the point of his coming?"

"Just to collect information."

"Information!" Jacques exclaimed. "When, as likely as not, the time has passed even for action!"

Jumelin shrugged his shoulders. "You and your precious action! D'you suppose it's still possible to decide on anything, with the situation changing from one hour to the next? Don't you know that Germany, too, has ordered general mobilization? The order came out at five, shortly after ours. And this very evening, they say, Germany will declare war on Russia officially."

"Look here," Jacques put in testily, "has or has not Müller come here to arrange for close cooperation between the German proletariat and the French, to fix up, belated though it has to be, a general strike in both countries?"

"A strike? Certainly not," Jumelin replied. "He has merely come, I believe, to find out whether the Party in France will or will not vote for the military budget the government intends to put before Parliament next Monday. That's all."

"Well, it would be that much gained," Rabbe put in, "if the Socialist members of both Parliaments, French and German, agreed to a common policy on that point."

"I wonder now," Jumelin observed enigmatically.

Jacques was hardly able to restrain his impatience.

"What one *is* entitled to say," Jumelin went on in an impressive tone, "and what our Party leaders, so I gather, have not failed to impress upon Müller in every possible way, is that France has done her utmost to avert war. Down to the very last minute. Even going so far as to move back her covering forces. We French Socialists, anyhow, have a clean conscience in that respect; and we've a perfect right to look upon Germany as the aggressor."

Jacques stared at him in amazement. "In other words," he exclaimed indignantly, "the French Socialist deputies are prepared to vote in favour of the war credits!"

"Anyhow, they can't vote against them."

"They can't? What do you mean?"

"What they're most likely to do is to abstain from voting one way or the other," Rabbe suggested.

"Oh," Jacques cried, "if only Jaurés were still with us!"

"Jaurés? In my opinion, under the present circumstances even the Skipper wouldn't have dared to vote against the government."

"But don't you know"—Jacques's voice was shrill with anger—"that Jaurés showed up time and again the absurdity of attempting to discriminate between the 'aggressor nation' and the 'victim of aggression'? It's a mere pretext for endless quibbling. You all seem to have lost sight of the real causes of the appalling situation we are in today-capitalism and the imperialistic aims of governments. Whatever impressions we may have about who fires the first shot, it's against war—aggressive and defensive equally—that international socialism must protest. Otherwise …"

Rabbe approved, but with reservations. "In principle, I agree. And Müller certainly seems to have said something on those lines."

"Well, then?"

Rabbe made no reply, but flung out his arms despondently.

"So that's as far as they've got? And off they marched to dinner, arm in arm?"

"No," Jumelin amended. "You've forgotten to mention that Müller said he wanted to phone Berlin and confer with his Party leaders."

"Good!" Jacques was only too thankful to clutch at the least straw. He turned on his heel, took a few rageful steps, came back, and faced the two men again. "Do you know what my opinion is? I suspect that fellow Müller came here simply to see how far the French Party would go in the way of internationalism and pacifism. And if he'd had to deal with genuine diehards, ready to go to any length, to call a general strike so as to thwart the imperialistic schemes of the government—well, in that case, let me tell you, peace might still have been preserved. Yes, even now, at the eleventh hour, even after orders have gone out for mobilization. Peace might still have been saved if the French and the German workers had united and thrown their weight into the scales. Instead of this, what did he find? A gang of word-spinners, of parlour Socialists, ready enough to denounce war and nationalism in their speeches, but quite prepared to vote in favour of the war credits tomorrow and to give the General Staff a free hand. Down to the very last minute we'll have persisted in the same absurd and criminal anomaly—the same damned shillyshallying between the internationalist ideal, to

which we all adhere in theory, and our so-called national interests, which no one, even among the Socialist leaders, is prepared to sacrifice in practice."

While he was speaking, Jenny, exhausted as she was, never took her eyes off him. Jacques's voice worked on her like music, soothing her nerves with its familiar cadences. She seemed all attention, though she was far too weary to listen to the words. She watched Jacques's face and, above all, his curiously expressive lips, restless as though endowed with independent life, and the sight of them gave her a physical sensation, as if his mouth were pressed on hers. Memories of the night spent in his arms made her heart grow faint with yearning. "Oh, why don't we go home?" she kept on saying to herself. "What is he waiting for? Why can't he come away? Let's go home. What does anything else matter?"

Cadieux, bustling from one group to the other, broadcasting "the latest," accosted them. "The Minister of the Interior has just been approached with a request for Müller to be allowed to call Berlin, but—nothing doing! All communication has been cut off. It's too late for anything to be done. There's martial law on both sides of the frontier."

"There went perhaps our last chance," Jacques whispered, turning to Jenny.

Cadieux overheard the remark. "The last chance for what?" he mocked.

"For action by the proletariat, for international action."

Cadieux had a twisted smile. "International, did you say? My dear fellow, let's see things as they are; from now on, there's only one thing that is international, and it's not the pacifist movement—it's war."

Was this only a forlorn attempt at wit? Shrugging his shoulders, Cadieux slipped away into the darkness.

"It's true," Jumelin muttered, "only too true. War has broken out. Whether we face the fact with good grace or bad, we Socialists —like all other Frenchmen—are from now on at war. Some day, I suppose, we'll get a chance of starting our international activities again, but that day's far ahead. For the time being pacifism is … a dead letter!"

"Can it be you, Jumelin, who talk like that?" Jacques exclaimed.

"Yes, it's me! We're up against a new state of affairs; there's a war on. To my mind, that alters everything, and our duty, as Socialists, is perfectly plain; we mustn't make things harder for the government."

Jacques stared at him in amazement. "And so you'd let yourself be mobilized?"

"Why, certainly. Next Tuesday, let me inform you, Comrade Jumelin will be a humble private in the 239th Territorial Regiment at Rouen."

Jacques stared at his feet, but made no comment. Rabbe came up and patted him on the shoulder. "Don't make yourself out more mulish than you are. If you don't think as he does today, I'll bet you will tomorrow. Why, it's as plain as can be: the cause of France is the cause of democracy. It's up to us as Socialists to stand up for democracy against those ruffianly imperialist powers that are attacking us."

"So you, too …?"

"Surely, my boy. If I was a few years younger, I'd volunteer for active service. I'll have a shot at it, even as it is. They may possibly find some use for these old bones of mine. Why do you stare at me like that? I haven't changed my mind. I sincerely hope to live long enough to be able some day to take up the fight against militarism once more. I still loathe militarism like poison. But it's no good blinking the facts. Militarism isn't what it used to be. One mayn't like it, but militarism today is the salvation of France; more than that, it's the salvation of democracy in the hour of peril. So I'm burying the hatchet—for the time being. And I'm quite prepared to act as the rest of the boys are acting—get hold of a gun and do my bit for the country. Later on—we shall see what we shall see."

He boldly met Jacques's disapproving gaze. The ghost of a smile, in which confusion and pride struggled for mastery, hovered about his lips, making the forlorn expression of his eyes more poignant still.

"Even Rabbe!" Jacques murmured to himself, averting his eyes. The air had suddenly become unbreathable. Catching Jenny's arm, he walked away with her abruptly, without a word of farewell.

Outside the gateway an excited crowd had gathered. In the middle of the crowd Pagès, Gallot's private secretary, was holding forth, gesticulating wildly. Among the younger militants surrounding him, Jacques recognized several familiar faces: Bouvier, Hérard, and Fougerolle; Latour, a leading trade unionist; Odelle and Chardent, editors on the *Humanité* staff.

Pagès caught sight of Jacques and beckoned to him. "Have you heard the news? A wire from St. Petersburg has just come in. Germany declared war on Russia this evening."

Bouvier, a sickly-looking man in the forties, with a sallow complexion, who often figured as a speaker at public meetings, turned toward Jacques. "It's an ill wind blows no one any good. Out there at the front there'll be work for everyone. Let 'em supply us with rifles and ammunition, and let's get on with the job."

Jacques did not answer him. He distrusted Bouvier; the man's shifty eyes displeased him. Mourlan had observed to him one evening as they left a political meeting at which Bouvier had delivered himself of a particularly violent harangue: "I've got no use for that fellow. He's a bit too zealous for my taste. Every time arrests are made, he's one of the first to be snapped up, but by some mysterious chance he always gets discharged."

"The biggest joke," Bouvier went on with a smothered laugh, "is that they think they're sending us to fight a nationalist war. They haven't the faintest notion that within a month from now it's a civil war we shall be fighting."

"And within a couple of months, a revolution!" cried Latour.

Jacques inquired icily: "So you, too, are going to let yourselves be mobilized?"

"Why, of course! It's too good a chance to let slip."

"What about you, Pagès?"

"What do you suppose!" His features did not have their usual expression, and there was an unwonted shrillness in his voice. He spoke, in fact, as if he had been drinking. "Now, this war that's starting, we're not to blame if it's not been possible to stop it. It had to come, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. At least let it bring about the end of this rotten social order which doesn't even realize that it's compassing its own destruction. It rests with us to make sure that capitalism doesn't survive the disaster it has brought upon itself. Let this war at least serve the cause of social evolution, let it be to the advantage of mankind, let it be the last, the freedom-giving war!"

"War on war!" a raucous voice yelled from the shadows.

"We're going to fight," Odelle exclaimed, "but as soldiers of the revolution, for the final disarmament and emancipation of every people of the earth."

Hérard, a postoffice employee, who always commanded attention on account of his extraordinary likeness to Briand—whose deep voice also he brought to mind, with its rich, passionate overtones—added slowly: "Yes, thousands and thousands of innocent people are going to be slaughtered. It's foul! And the only thing that can possibly reconcile one to such an abomination is the thought that we shall thus be paying the ransom of the future. Those who survive this baptism of blood will have newly tempered souls. They will see nothing before them but ruins. But on those ruins they will at last be able to build up the new social order."

Jenny, standing behind Jacques, saw his shoulders lift a little. She thought he was about to take part in the discussion. But he turned toward her without saying a word. She was struck by the change in his expression. Again he linked his arm in hers and moved away from the group, pressing her to his side. He was glad to have her with him; the feeling of loneliness that had come over him lost something of its bitterness. "No," he thought. "No! Far better die than tolerate what my very soul abhors! Far better die than be guilty of such a betrayal!"

"Did you hear them?" he said after a while. "It's simply incredible the way they've changed!"

Just then Fougerolle, who had not uttered a word during the talk outside the gates, came up to them. "You're quite right," he blurted out, abruptly forcing them to come to a standstill. "I had half a mind to desert, let me tell you, rather than play false to my ideas. Yes, that's how I felt. But if I were to do so, I'd never feel certain of having done it from conscientious motives and not out of sheer panic. For there's no denying it, I'm scared stiff! And so, ridiculous as it is, I'll act as they will; I'll join up."

Without giving Jacques time to answer, he marched resolutely off.

"I dare say lots of others feel as he does," Jacques murmured pensively.

Skirting the Palais-Bourbon along the Rue de Bourgogne, they walked down to the Seine.

"Do you know what struck me most?" Jacques said after another silence. "It was the look in their eyes, the tone of their voices, a sort of involuntary exhilaration one couldn't help noticing in their behaviour. In fact, one can't help wondering, supposing they were to hear tonight that orders had been issued for demobilization, whether their first reaction wouldn't be one of disappointment. And the most tragic thing of all," he went on in the same breath, "is the tremendous amount of energy expended by them in the service of war. The courage, the contempt of death. The waste of so much steadfastness of spirit, a hundredth part of which would have been enough to stop war from breaking out if only it had been employed, while there yet was time, in the service of peace!"

On their way across the Pont de la Concorde, they met Stefany, walking alone, with bowed head, horn-rimmed spectacles straddling the big, bony nose. He, too, was hurrying to the spot, eager to learn the outcome of the negotiations.

Jacques informed him that the conversations had been adjourned and were to be resumed a little later on, in the *Humanité* building.

"In that case I'll go back to the office," Stefany declared, turning back.

Jacques was still lost in sombre thought. He took a few steps without speaking; then, remembering Mourlan's prophecy, he plucked Stefany's sleeve. "It's all over," he said. "There are no true Socialists left. There are only Socialists-in-uniform."

"What makes you say that?"

"They're all prepared to take part in the war. They imagine they're obeying their conscience by sacrificing their revolutionary ideals to the 'my-country-is-in-danger' mumbo-jumbo. The bitterest opponents of war have been the most eager to join up: Jumelin, Pagès, every one of them! Why, old Rabbe himself is prepared to volunteer if they'll have him!"

"What? Rabbe?" Stefany sounded incredulous, but caught himself up at once. "No, I'm not really surprised. Cadieux is off as well, and Berthet, and Jourdain. They've all had their marching-orders in their pockets since yesterday. Even Gallot, near-sighted as he is, has begged Guesde to put in a word for him at the ministry to get him approved by the commissariat and sent on active service."

"The Party's leaderless, in fact," Jacques gloomily summed up.

"The Party? I wouldn't go so far as that. But what certainly is leaderless is the opposition to the forces that make for war."

Jacques drew closer to his friend in a rush of brotherly affection. "You, too, are of the opinion, aren't you, that if Jaurés were still with us …?"

"Of course, he'd be on our side! Or rather the Party would have stood by him to a man. Dunois it was who put the matter in a nutshell: 'The Socialist conscience wouldn't be divided against itself.' "

In silence they crossed the Place de la Concorde, which, now there was no wheeled traffic, seemed more spacious, more brilliantly lighted than usual. Stefany's sallow face kept twitching spasmodically. All of a sudden he stopped dead. The light from a street-lamp, lengthening his features, made them stand out in clean-cut relief and struck brief, intermittent flashes from the glasses masking the darkness of his deep-set eyes.

"Jaurés!" he exclaimed. As he uttered the name his melodious Southern voice took on so tender, so heart-broken an intonation that Jacques felt a lump rise to his throat. "Do you know what he said in my presence, last Thursday, just as he was leaving Brussels? Huysmans was starting back to Amsterdam and saying good-bye to him. The Skipper looked him squarely in the eyes, and said: 'Look here, Huysmans. Even if war should break out, mind you keep the International afloat. If friends beg you to take sides in the struggle, do nothing of the sort. Keep the International afloat. Even if I myself were to come and beg you to declare yourself for one side or the other, don't listen, Huysmans! At all costs, whatever happens, stand by the International.' "

Jacques was stirred to the depths of his being. "Yes, even if there are but ten of us left. Even if there are but two. Our duty is to keep the International alive, whatever happens." His voice was vibrant with emotion. Jenny, deeply moved herself, drew close to his side, but he did not seem to notice her. Once again he repeated slowly, as though making a vow to himself: "To keep the International alive!"

But how is one to go about it? he mused. And it seemed to him that he was setting forth alone into the heart of darkness… .

It was past midnight when Jacques and Jenny left the *Humanité* offices, where a crowd of militants had gathered to hear the latest news. Though he had lost all hope, Jacques had been unwilling to leave the place without knowing the upshot of the conversations with the German delegate. Time and again, distressed by Jenny's look of utter weariness, he had begged her to go home to bed, saying he would join her later on; but on every occasion she had refused to go. Finally, in Stefany's private office, where they had taken refuge in company with a score of other Socialists, Gallot informed, them that the conference was drawing to an end. Indeed,

Müller and de Man had cut things fine; it was as much as they could do to make the Gare du Nord in time for the last train to Belgium that was available for civilians. Jacques and Jenny saw them rushing down the passage. Cachin, who was wearing the sash that proclaimed his rank as deputy, was detailed to see them to the train and safely off. Even so, there were doubts as to whether Müller would be allowed to cross the Belgian frontier.

Under a volley of questions, Gallot irritably shook his tousled head. In the end, however, a few scraps of information were wrung from him. By and large, he admitted, this final contact between the French and German Socialists had yielded no result whatever. After six hours of heart-to-heart discussion, it had been found necessary to be content with the expression of a pious hope that both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Reichstag the Socialists, without actually voting against the war credits, would at least abstain from voting at all. The meeting had adjourned, after reaching the pathetically lame conclusion that, "considering the unsettled nature of the situation, there was no immediate possibility of entering into more definite commitments."

In fact, it had been a complete fiasco. The doctrine of international solidarity had been proved a mere delusion and a snare.

Jacques turned and gazed at Jenny, as though seeking from her some consolation for his frustrated hopes. She was seated at a little distance from him on a stool, leaning against a bookcase, with her hands listlessly resting on her knees. The light from a lamp above fell slantwise on her profile, forming deep pools of shadow under her eyelids and cheekbones. The effort it cost her to keep her eyes open had dilated the pupils. He had a sudden longing to fold her in his arms, rock her to sleep, bring respite to her weariness. And the pity Jacques was feeling for mankind that night suddenly crystallized into a vast compassion for this frail, tired girl who from now on was to mean all the world for him.

He went up to her, helped her to rise, and silently led her from the room. She hurried down the staircase in front of him, her weariness a thing of the past. But once outside in the street, when she felt Jacques's feverish arm steal round her waist, she suddenly was conscious in the midst of her joy of a curious, indefinable thrill of something still more potent than the deep emotion linking her to him body and soul—a thrill quite new to her and terrifying in its violence, and bringing such a rush of blood to her head that she felt dizzy, all but lost her balance, and raised her hand to her brows.

"Why, Jenny, you're worn out!" he exclaimed in dismay. "What's to be done? I'm afraid there's no prospect of getting a cab tonight."

Clinging to each other, their tired nerves all on edge, they made their way across the darkness.

There were still quite a number of people in the streets. Small groups of policemen and municipal guards were posted at every crossing.

In the Place de Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, they were surprised to find the doors of the church wide open. The nave glowed in the darkness like some magic grotto, its coigns of shadow lit with clustered candles that made the apse a haze of broken lights. Late though the hour was, the aisles were full of silent figures bent in prayer; on their knees round the confessionals, a number of young men were awaiting their turn. Jacques was greatly interested and could not help being moved at the thought of the distress of mind that lay behind this uprush of religious feeling. He even made as if to enter the church, but Jenny indignantly pulled him away. Instinctively, no doubt, with three centuries of Protestantism in her blood, she balked at the pomp and "idolatry" of Roman Catholic ceremonial.

They began walking again, without exchanging their impressions.

Jenny was growing more and more exhausted, and leaned heavily on Jacques's arm. At one moment, for no apparent reason, she took his hand and pressed her cheek to it. He stopped short, his senses tingling. Casting a quick glance round, he drew her into a doorway and caught her in his arms. "At last!" she thought. Her lips grew soft and now she made no effort to elude his kiss, the kiss she had been awaiting so many weary hours. Shutting her eyes, with a thrill of pleasure she gave her lips to his.

After crossing the Central Market, they walked up the Boulevard Saint-Michel. The time, by the Law Courts clock, was a quarter-past one. There were no longer so many pedestrians about, but, in the main streets leading to the city gates, the roadway was occupied by an endless stream of commandeered vehicles, horses led by the bridle, motorcars driven by soldiers in uniform, regiments marching in silence to secret destinations. That night there was no rest anywhere in Europe.

They made slow progress. Jenny was limping, and she confessed to Jacques that one of her shoes was hurting. He insisted on her leaning more heavily on his arm, and held her up, all but carried her bodily.

It made her feel at once mortified and deeply touched. As they drew nearer home, an undercurrent of anxiety mingled with their impatience. Both were conscious of having reached the extreme limit of mental and physical endurance, yet all the same, across the dusk of weariness and foreboding, glowed a steady flame of joy.

Jenny's first glance, after switching on the light in the hall, was to make sure, as she never failed to do when she came in, that the concierge had not slipped a telegram from Vienna under the door. Nothing. Her heart sank. There was no longer any chance of hearing from her mother before they left.

"Let's hope communications between Austria and Switzerland haven't been cut," she murmured. That was now her sole remaining hope.

Jacques tried to comfort her. "The moment we get to Geneva, we'll go round to the French consulate."

They lingered in the hall, each obsessed by memories of the previous nighty and suddenly they were abashed at finding themselves alone again under the garish light that ruthlessly revealed their faces drawn with fatigue and their eyes haunted by the same recollection.

"Come," Jacques said, but dared not make a move. Unthinkingly he stooped to pick up a newspaper, folded it slowly, and replaced it on the hall-table. "I'm simply dying for a drink of water," he remarked with somewhat forced unconcern. "How about you?"

"So'm I."

In the kitchen the remains of their midday meal still littered the table. "Our first lunch together." Jacques smiled. "And didn't I enjoy it!"

He turned on the tap, waited till the water ran cold, then handed the glass to Jenny, who had sunk into the nearest chair. She took a few sips and gave the glass back to him, turning away her eyes. She was sure he would put his lips to the place where she had put her own. He gulped down two glassfuls in quick succession, gave a little grunt of satisfaction, and came over to her. Taking her face between his hands, he bent toward her. But he merely gave her a long look, his face almost touching hers. Then he said very gently:

“You poor darling, it’s terribly late, and you’re quite fagged out. And tomorrow night there’s that dreadful train journey before us. Now you just go and have a good long sleep in your own bed.”

She did not answer, but her shoulders suddenly drooped. He forced her to rise; swaying on her feet, she let him draw her to the door of her room.

It was in darkness but for the faint glimmer of the summer night sky entering through the window.

“Now you must go to sleep, go to sleep,” he whispered in her ear, like an incantation.

She straightened up and remained standing in the doorway, pressed close against him.

“Over there!” Her voice came in a whisper.

“Over there” meant the couch in Daniel’s room. He took a deep breath, but gave no answer. When Jenny had consented to go with him to Switzerland, his first thought had been: It’s in Geneva she’ll be mine. But after the tempestuous emotions of that eventful day, the balance of the universe seemed to have been shattered. The unforeseen had become normal; the exceptional, the rule; no pledge held good.

For a few moments yet, fully conscious of the struggle within him, he stood fast. Then, moving back a step, he gazed earnestly at her.

She looked up at him; her eyes were crystal-clear. The same unrest, the same joy, pure and profound, possessed them both.

Then, “Yes,” he said at last.

# Chapter XVIII

DUE in Paris shortly before five in the afternoon, the Simplon express did not reach Laroche Junction till after eleven p.m. There it was promptly relegated to a siding so as to leave the main line free for army supply trains. Composed almost entirely of third-class cars, the train was packed, with thirteen or fourteen passengers wedged into compartments intended to take ten. At one in the morning, after much shunting and several false starts, it drew out laboriously from Laroche. Three a.m. found it feeling its way through Melun station, soon after leaving which it came to a stop on the Seine bridge. Night was waning, and the bend of the river glimmered faintly in the dusk; lines of street-lamps twinkling across the dawn-mist revealed the nearness of the city. Little by little, behind the hills, a pale sheen was spreading up the sky, and against the light a long line of moving forms came into view, a regiment on the march along the river-bank.

At last, at half-past four, after innumerable delays and stops in tunnels, whistling incessantly and pulling up at every signal as it crawled through the suburbs, the train drew up at a platformless siding three hundred yards from the Paris terminal.

Mme. de Fontanin joined the stream of passengers whom railway employees had bundled out of the train onto the roadbed and were shepherding along the tracks toward the station. The heavy suitcase she was carrying hit her ankles at every step and made her stagger.

When she left Vienna in one of the last trains conveying foreigners to Italy, the city had been in a fever of war activity. She had been travelling for three days, had changed trains seven times, and had not slept for three nights. Nevertheless, she had succeeded in getting the charges against her husband withdrawn, and the name of Fontanin was not to appear in the proceedings.

The Gare de Lyon looked more like a bivouac than a railway terminal. Red-trousered men were everywhere, and Mme. de Fontanin had to thread her way between piles of arms. At every turn she came against barriers guarded by sentries and was compelled to retrace her steps a dozen times before finally leaving the station. Her haunting anxiety for her son was intensified by the sight of all these men in uniform. She had had no news of him since her departure; but, she consoled herself, there would certainly be letters awaiting her at home. What destiny lay in store for him? she wondered. A picture rose before her of her soldier son in his smart uniform, his helmet flashing in the early light as he reined in his horse beside some frontier boundary-post, ready to defend his country in its hour of peril. He is in God's keeping, she mused, and to fear for him would be unfaith in Providence.

No taxis or buses were to be found outside the station. No matter; she could very well walk home. The joy of feeling so near her goal made her almost forget how tired she was. But what about her baggage? Outside the baggage room she had seen a waiting line of people more than a hundred strong. On the far side of the wide square facing the station she descried an open café; with an effort she carried the heavy bag across to it. The tables were in disorder, the waiters half asleep, and, though the sun was getting high, several lamps were still on; evidently the café, regulations notwithstanding, had remained open all night. The girl at the cash-desk, moved to pity by the white-haired lady's pleading smile, agreed to look after the valise for her, and, relieved of her burden, Mme. de Fontanin set out homeward. At last she was near the end of her tribulations; in half an hour or so she would be back at home with Jenny, sipping her morning tea. The prospect gave her a new lease of energy.

On that morning of the second of August, despite the early hour, the streets of Paris were so full of people that she was surprised to find the street-door closed. Her watch had stopped; as she walked past the concierge's room, the curtains of which were drawn, she made a hasty guess at the time—half-past five or earlier. Jenny's asleep, she thought as she climbed the stairs to the apartment; she'll have put up the chain—I wonder if she'll hear the doorbell.

Before ringing, on the off-chance, she tried her key in the lock. The door opened at the first turn; it was not even double-locked.

The first thing her eyes fell on in the hall was a man's hat, a black felt hat. Could it be Daniel's? Impossible. All the doors stood open. A sudden panic seized her. She took a few steps forward. At the end of the corridor the light was on in the kitchen. What did it mean? Could she be dreaming? Her mind seemed to have gone blank; she steadied herself against the wall and listened. Not a sound. It looked as if the apartment were empty. What about that hat, though, and the light on in the kitchen? Burglars? Without thinking, she began walking down the corridor. Suddenly, at the open door of Daniel's bedroom, she stopped short, stared aghast. On the sofa lay two bodies locked in a close embrace.

For a second the still more horrible idea of murder glanced across her mind; a second only, for at once she recognized the faces nestling on the rumpled cushions: Jenny was sleeping in Jacques's arms.

Hurriedly she shrank back into the shadows of the corridor, pressing her hand to her bosom as though the clamour of her heart might betray her presence. Her one thought was to escape, to banish from her sight that hideous humiliation, theirs and hers.

She tiptoed hastily back into the hall. A sudden faintness came over her; her limbs seemed giving way beneath her. She felt inclined to wonder if she had not been the victim of a hallucination till her eyes fell again on Jacques's hat insolently lording it on the hall-table. Then, bracing herself, she opened the door softly, softly drew it behind her, and, clinging to the banisters, walked, step by dragging step, down the interminable flights of stairs.

And now …? To get the street-door open would she have to wake up the concierge, give her name, tell of her return, account for this precipitate departure? As it happened, the concierge, awakened presumably by her arrival, had got up and was dressing. There was a light behind the curtains and the street-door stood open. She crept out like an escaping thief.

She had no idea where to go, where to seek refuge. Crossing the street, she entered the public gardens. No one was about. Wearily she dropped onto the nearest seat. About her all was silence, the limpid calm of a summer dawn. The only sound was a remote, incessant drone of trucks and transport wagons rumbling down the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

Mme. de Fontanin made no effort to understand; she did not even speculate as to what could have been happening during her absence or how things could have come to that pass. Indeed, coherent thinking was beyond her. But she still could see, and the picture hovering before her mind's eye had all the vividness of reality—the crumpled cushions on the sofa, the pale gleam of Jenny's bare foot in the dawnlight filtering through the curtain, Jacques's arm round her neck, their attitude of languorous abandon, and, lingering on their lips drawn near in sleep, an expression of rapturous, half-anguished ecstasy. Ashamed and scandalized though she was, she

could not help murmuring: "How nice they looked!" Already her indignation, her first reaction of disgust, was being tempered by that other sentiment so deeply engrained in her: her respect for others' freedom of action and personal responsibility, for human destiny… .

It seemed almost as if Jacques had grown dimly aware in sleep that something had stirred in the apartment; his eyelids fluttered, he opened his eyes. In a flash it all came back to him. Before resting on Jenny's sleepbound face, his gaze roved over a bare foot, the soft curve of a breast, a shoulder. What sadness, he thought, is in the set of her young lips; how those calm features seem marked by suffering! By suffering and yet by infinite repose—like the death-mask of a child whose last agony has been intense.

Holding his breath, he kept his eyes fixed on the tormented lips and for the while his love was mastered by a vast compassion, by remorse and apprehension for the days to come. They were puppets of fatality—no, not of fatality; he had all along intended this should happen, he alone had sought it. From the first he had marked Jenny down as his prey. As a boy at Maisons-Laffitte it was he who had thrust himself upon her, forced her love—only to take flight immediately, leaving her to her despair. And now, this summer, once more he had returned to the attack, just when she was beginning to regain her peace of mind, to forget. Now the irreparable had happened; a week ago she could still have lived without him. No longer was that possible. Henceforth she was his, must follow where he led. Toward what unknown, what desperate adventure? Without him now she would find no savour in life. And with him—would she be happy? No; only too well he knew it. Antoine was right: he was not the kind of man to bring happiness to another.

The thought of Antoine slewed his gaze round toward the clock. He had to see his brother off this morning. Twenty to six. In five minutes he must be up.

Through the open window came an intermittent rumble; regiments, transport wagons, artillery trains were passing through the city. War was there beside them, sounding its malevolent reveille with the break of day. August 2. Paris had wakened to a world at war.

He sat up, listened attentively, staring straight before him, his brows clammy with sweat. Now and then the sounds died away, and a tense silence followed; a silence broken only by the twittering of birds and the rustle of wind in the treetops. Then in the distance the ominous rumble set in again. Another regiment was debouching into the boulevard; the tramp of marching feet drew nearer, swelled to a steady roar that crowded out the silence, drowning the small, gay sounds of birds, jarring the bright air with its ponderous rhythm.

Very gently he slipped his arm again around Jenny's shoulders and drew her sleeping form toward him. He felt her body suddenly becoming tense as flesh touched flesh, and heard her whisper: "No, dear—*please!*" But then her eyelids parted; a tender, timid smile grew on her lips and slowly, very slowly, the fear died from her eyes. For a moment they stayed thus, linked in each other's arms, their limbs quivering a little with memories of the night. But their memories were not the same. When Jacques tightened his embrace, Jenny instinctively shrank away; the fear of suffering again paralysed her emotion. At last, vanquished by love, by weakness, by the thrill of self-sacrifice no less than her own desire, she yielded. Deliberately yielded—but to her act of self-surrender she imparted just enough passion, and even joy, for Jacques to be misled and fail to guess the dread, the resignation, and the effort of will that lay behind it… .

Leaning back on the seat, her hands folded on her lap, Mme. de Fontanin was gazing vaguely into the distance, too tired for thought, unaware of the lapse of time.

The morning sun shone bright, birds were singing everywhere, and the garden with its greenery and flowers and statues casting their long shadows on the grass seemed like a neutral haven from the world's unrest. Of the men and women who hurried past across the avenue none came near or cast a glance at the lonely woman in mourning sitting by herself. The trees hid from her the windows of her apartment, but she could see beyond a shrubbery the front door of the building.

Suddenly she lowered her head, let down her veil. Jacques, followed by Jenny, had appeared in the doorway. They were too far off to recognize her. When after some moments she looked up again, they were walking rapidly away.

She drew a deep breath; the blood was racing wildly in her veins. Haggard-eyed, she watched the two receding forms till they were out of sight. For a little while she sat on, without the heart to move. At last she rose and almost briskly—the long wait, in spite of all, had rested her a little—started walking home.

# Chapter XIX

"YOU'D better stay here and rest," Jacques had said to Jenny. "I'm going to see Antoine off. After that I'll say good bye to Mourlan, and look in at the C.G.T. and *Humanité* offices. I'll be back here to fetch you somewhere around noon."

But Jenny would hear nothing of this programme. She was quite determined not to stay in the apartment by herself.

"And how about your packing? And the famous tidying-up you were talking about yesterday? Why, you'll never be ready in time for the evening train," he added teasingly.

She smiled. There was something quite new in her smile, and a shy, sensuous languor misted her gaze.

"Oh, I've my morning all fixed up. I'm going to have another look at that little garden, *our* garden, beside St. Vincent's Church. You can meet me there, after you've seen your brother off at the station, or later if you prefer. That all right, Jacques dear?"

They agreed to walk together across the Luxembourg Gardens to Antoine's place. After that, she would go to St. Vincent's Church and wait patiently for him to rejoin her in the garden. She ran to her room to dress.

Antoine had left Anne at three in the morning. Unable to resist a nostalgic craving to see her once again, he had indulged in this last joyless joy—without illusions, like the condemned man taking his last repast before he mounts the scaffold. But Anne's outburst of wild despair as he said good-bye, and his own regret for having thus weakly yielded to desire, had left him profoundly shaken. He had returned in the small hours and spent the rest of the night on his feet, turning out drawers, burning old letters and the like, and enclosing small sums of money in envelopes marked with the names of various recipients-to-be: M. Chasle, the maids, Mile, de Waize—not forgetting the two young orphans living in the Rue de Verneuil: the bright little office-boy Robert Bonnard and his brother. For he had kept in touch with them, if intermittently, and did not wish them to find themselves stranded in the financial chaos of the first weeks of the war. Then he had written a long letter to Gise, advising her to stay in England, and another letter to Jacques—addressed to Geneva, for he was convinced that, after what had passed between them on the previous day, his brother would not come to bid him good-bye. In a few affectionate phrases he told Jacques how sorry he was to have wounded him and begged him to write now and then.

Then he had gone to his dressing-room and put on his uniform. Once in uniform, he felt his calm returning—as if he had taken the plunge and the worst was over.

As he buckled on his leggings he mentally recapitulated all he had planned to do before his departure. Nothing had been overlooked. A comforting thought that added to his self-composure. It suddenly struck him that a good many more things would be needed if he was to carry out efficiently his duties as medical officer in the field. Promptly he bundled out the contents of his army medical kit—though he had given much care and thought to packing it the night before—and replaced the greater part of his personal effects, clothing, and even the books which in a moment of weakness he had decided to take with him by everything he could find in his cabinets in the way of bandages, compresses, forceps, syringes, anaesthetics, and antiseptics.

The two maids had been up and about for some hours, and were roaming in the passages. Léon had already left Paris; before joining his regiment he had wanted to go to his hometown to say good-bye to "the old folks."

Adrienne entered and announced that breakfast was served in the dining-room. Her eyes were red. She begged Antoine to find room in his kit for a cold roast chicken, wrapped in paper, that she had brought with her… .

As he was rising from the breakfast-table there was a ring at the bell. He sped to the door and an affectionate smile lit up his face. Could it be Jacques?

Jacques it was. He halted in the doorway. Antoine went up to him rather awkwardly. Both were tongue-tied with emotion and they shook hands in silence, as if nothing had passed between them on the previous day.

At last Jacques managed to get out a few words. "I was afraid I'd be too late. Were you just going to start?"

"Yes. It's seven. Time to be moving."

He did his best to steady his voice. With a would-be careless gesture he picked up his service-cap and put it on. It did not fit and sat comically perched on the top of his head. Had his head grown since his last period of military service? he wondered. Or was he wearing his hair longer nowadays? Catching sight of himself in the hall-mirror, he frowned. As he clumsily buckled on his belt, his eyes lingered on the familiar scene, in a last leave-taking of home, civilian life—his pre-war self. But always they strayed back to the unflattering reflection in the glass.

The two maids, who had been hovering in the background, watching him, burst into loud sobs. Vexed though he was, Antoine conjured up a smile and shook hands with each. "Now, then, you two, what's all the fuss about?"

His martial tone did not ring quite true. Noticing it, to cut things short, he turned to Jacques. "Lend us a hand with this contraption, like a good fellow."

Each gripping a handle of the medicine-chest, they walked onto the landing. As they crossed the threshold, a corner of the chest grazed the open door, scoring a long furrow in the newly varnished woodwork. Noticing it, Antoine made an involuntary gesture of annoyance, promptly amended to one of unconcern. No moment, perhaps, brought home to him more vividly than this the rift between his past life and the days to come.

They went down the two flights of stairs without exchanging a word. Antoine felt half stifled in his stiff collar and tight-fitting jacket, and his service-boots seemed made of lead. By the time they reached the foot of the stairs he was quite out of breath.

"Silly of me!" he panted. "I'd quite forgotten about the elevator!"

Foreseeing that no taxis would be available, he had decided to use his own car. Victor, his chauffeur, had been called up for service in a motor transport unit, so he took with him an elderly mechanic from a neighbouring garage to drive the car back.

The concierge, in a white dressing-jacket, was waiting under the portico to see him off. "Oh, M. Antoine!" she whimpered.

"Good-bye, see you again soon!" he cried cheerfully, then, after installing the mechanic in the back of the car and Jacques in the seat beside him, took the wheel.

The streets were getting crowded already. The sanitation services had partly broken down and unemptied garbage-cans stood in the doorways.

On the road beside the Seine the car had to make a long halt to allow a column of trucks and dismantled buses with army drivers to go by. They were held up again at the Pont Royal, where the middle of the road was blocked by a crowd of people gazing skyward and waving their hats enthusiastically. Leaning out to look up, Jacques saw five airplanes in V-formation flying very low and heading northeast. The tricolour badges on the lower wings were plainly visible.

In the Rue de Rivoli, between two lines of spectators, a regiment of colonial infantry in field-service uniform marched by without a band. The silence was impressive and, as the commanding officers rode past, the men in the crowd raised their hats.

The balconies in the Avenue de l'Opéra were gay with flags. They passed a Red Cross ambulance unit, then a detachment of soldiers in fatigue coats, carrying packs and shovels. At the Place de l'Opera they had to halt again as an artillery train, followed by ten armoured cars, roared down the boulevard toward the Bastille. On the roof of the opera-house workmen were busy installing searchlights in view of a possible night-raid by "*Taubes*."

Despite the efforts of the police to disperse them, excited mobs were massed in front of Austrian and German shops that had been looted during the night. The sidewalk beside the Cristallerie de Bo-heme was strewn with broken glass and china. The Brasserie Viennoise looked as if a storming-party had gone through it; the front had been completely wrecked and inside was a chaos of shattered mirrors, tables, and chairs reduced to matchwood.

Silently Jacques noted these earliest symptoms of patriotism running amuck. He found these street-scenes and the expressions of people's faces extraordinarily interesting. He would have liked to say something to his brother, but nothing came; he hoped his silence would seem due to the presence of the garage hand behind them. Meanwhile thoughts were racing through his mind in feverish haste: of Jenny, of their night together, and of their impending journey to Geneva… . But then—what next? Always his mind came up against the problem and found no issue. The Talking Shop, Meynestrel… . No, on no account would he let himself be drawn back into that life of futile conspiracies, vain palaverings, eternal marking time. Not words but deeds he wanted now; a life of action with all its perils.

Suddenly he gave a start. Antoine, who had been driving at a snail's pace, sounding the horn at every moment to clear a way through the crowds that kept swarming over the roadway, had seized the opportunity of a momentary halt to take one hand off the wheel and, without a word, without even turning his head, to lay his hand gently on Jacques's knee. But before Jacques had a chance of responding to this fraternal token of affection, the car had started moving again and Antoine had withdrawn his hand.

The Rue de Maubeuge was black with men about to join their regiments, pressing forward up the hill that led to the station; many were accompanied by wives and parents.

"What a hurry they're in!" Jacques's voice betrayed his amazement.

"And the chances are," Antoine remarked ironically, with a forced laugh, "that all these poor devils will have to wait half the day or longer, parked on a platform, before they are entrained."

Yes, Jacques thought, they want to report on time, they're eager to start their war with a punctual kowtow to discipline! How little they must understand that they're the greater number and could, if they chose, have the last word about it all!

A wooden paling run up during the night, and picketed by troops, barred access to the station. There was no question of driving up to it, so dense was the crowd, and Antoine stopped the car and alighted. Jacques helped him across the road with his field-chest. The narrow entrance was guarded by an infantry platoon with fixed bayonets. Only mobilized men were allowed to pass the barrier.

A sergeant-major was inspecting the reservists' service-books. Glancing up, he saw Antoine's bands, saluted, and at once detailed a private to carry the officer's kit.

Antoine turned his head and looked at Jacques. Each read the same question in the other's eyes: "Shall we meet again?" And both at the same moment felt their tears welling up uncontrollably. All their youth, every detail, trivial yet unique, of their home life together in earlier days, stored up in their memories and theirs alone, flashed into consciousness like pictures on a screen. Simultaneously they opened their arms and clumsily embraced each other. The peak of Antoine's field service-cap jogged Jacques's felt hat. Years and years had passed since they had thus embraced—in fact, they had never done so since those childhood days which memory had just now brought back to them so vividly.

The man detailed to carry Antoine's kit had shouldered it and was beginning to move away. Hastily Antoine freed himself, and now his one idea was to follow the man, not to lose sight of his field-chest—the only thing in this new world that still was truly his. He had ceased looking at his brother and was stretching out his arm fumblingly. His hand found Jacques's and clasped it fiercely, desperately; then, stumbling a little, he joined the stream of people entering the station.

Blinded by his tears, jostled by new arrivals, Jacques backed to the paling and leaned against it. One by one, without a pause, the men called up were being passed in. All looked alike and all were young. All had put on the old clothes they could best dispense with, caps and heavy shoes; each carried slung across his back a bulging canvas bag and a brand-new haversack from which the neck of a bottle and a chunk of bread protruded. Their faces wore a look of mournful resignation, the look of men who have lived down despair and fear. Jacques watched them crossing the street, service-books in hand; already they were alone, and yet, half-way across, some paused, glancing back to the sidewalk they had just left, to wave a hand or hearten with a jaunty smile the man or woman watching them with anguished eyes. Then, setting their jaws, they strode forward to the opening of the barrier, into the "rat-trap."

"Don't stand about, my boy. Move on, there!"

The "regular" on sentry duty along the barrier, rifle at the slope, his stubby fingers clamped upon the butt, was a strapping lad with an incipient moustache, boyish though rather shifty eyes, and a portentous frown betokening his sense of the importance of his duties.

Jacques complied and moved back to the road.

A luxurious car drove past with an inscription on the windshield: *Free Rides for Men Called Up*. The chauffeur was in livery. Half a dozen youths with haversacks lolled inside, yelling at the top of their voices: "We want Alsace! We want Lorraine!"

As Jacques stepped onto the sidewalk he saw beside him a man and woman bidding each other good-bye, gazing into each other's eyes for the last time. A little boy of four was clinging to the woman's skirt, dancing round her, singing to himself, delighted with this unexpected outing. The man stooped, snatched up the boy, and kissed him—so roughly that the youngster flew into a temper, kicked and struggled till his father put him down again. The woman did not move, said nothing. Her hair straggling down her neck, cheeks

wet with tears, she stared at her husband with insatiable eyes. As if he feared that she would fling herself on him and there would be no shaking her off, instead of taking her in his arms he drew back a step, his eyes still fixed on hers. Then abruptly he turned on his heel and strode toward the station. His wife did not try to call him back, or linger watching his receding form; she too turned abruptly and walked rapidly away. The child trailing after her tripped and almost fell; she reached down and hoisted him onto her shoulder, without stopping. She gave the impression of being in a desperate hurry to get back to her home, her empty home, where at last, behind closed doors, she could cry her heart out.

Jacques looked away, profoundly touched by the little scene. Then he fell to roaming aimlessly in the neighbouring streets, but, try as he might to keep away, something drew him back time and again to this tragedy-laden corner of Paris to which that morning many and many a victim was hastening to keep his rendezvous with fate, severing his life from every human tie. In those sad, courageous eyes his eyes sought for an answering glance, a single look in which, behind the stolid grief, he might discern a glimmer of the pent-up indignation that clenched his fists in his pockets and set him trembling with baffled fury. In vain. Diverse as were the expressions on the faces he scanned, all had the same air of discouragement, the same forlorn passivity. Here and there he caught a gleam of reckless heroism, but elsewhere only a blind acceptance of the sacrifice imposed, the same craven or unconscious betrayal of personal independence. At that moment, indeed, it seemed to him that what little was left of liberty in the world had taken refuge in himself alone.

And suddenly this thought made his heart swell with pride and a sense of power. *His* faith, anyhow, was inviolate as ever, and it exalted him above the herd. Misunderstood though he might be, an outcast, yet he felt stronger, single-handed, in his rebellion than all these people doped with lies and tamely acquiescent. Justice and truth were in him; reason and the dark forces of the future, on his side. This momentary defeat of pacifist ideals could not impair their grandeur or imperil their final victory. No force in the world could prevent what was happening today from being an absurdity, a monstrous error, even though millions of victims chose to endorse it, to accept it with courageous stoicism. "No force in the world," he told himself, in a rush of mingled confidence and despair, "can prevent a true idea from being true. A day will come, when, despite these setbacks, despite conspiracies to stifle it, truth will break through and triumph."

But in a world at war how was he to serve the cause of truth? Determined to keep his freedom of action, he was leaving France; but what would he make of his liberty?

His lukewarmness of the past few days as to the revolutionary cause struck him now as weakness. He was inclined to put the blame upon his love. And now that Jenny had come back to his thoughts, he was amazed to find how easily and utterly he had forgotten all about her during the past hour. Almost he felt a grievance against her—for existing, awaiting him, wresting him from the rapture of his lonely dream. "Supposing she died suddenly?" he thought, and for a moment savoured a grief that was half joy, joy for his independence given back to him.

Less than ten minutes after Antoine had left home for the station, a venerable four-wheeler, more in place in a museum beside an old sedan-chair than in a Paris street, drew up at the door. The girl who stepped out of it cast a bewildered glance at the fence and freshly painted facade, then paid the cabman, picked up two valises lying on the seat, and walked rapidly to the entrance.

The concierge peeped out of her doorway. "Why, bless us, it's Mile. Gise!"

From the consternation in her eyes Gise guessed she had some bad news to impart.

"What a shame, Mademoiselle! You're just too late. M. Antoine left a few minutes ago."

"Left?"

"Why, yes, to join his regiment."

Gise made no reply. Her gentle, trustful eyes grew misted; she put the valises down beside her. On the small round face that had now gone greyish-brown, making the dark strain in her blood still more pronounced, a look of stupefaction seemed to sit quite naturally, as if its pattern had been traced out in advance. She had been spending her summer holidays, with the other girls from her convent, at an English seaside resort and had followed what was happening in Europe in only the vaguest way. It was not till the previous day that, on reading in a paper that France was mobilizing, she had taken alarm and, refusing to listen to advice, without even going back to London, had rushed to Dover and caught the first boat across.

"All the menfolk here have been called up, Mademoiselle, like everyone else. Léon left yesterday evening; so did Victor. There's only the servants, Adrienne and Clotilde, upstairs."

Gise's face lit up with relief. Adrienne and Clotilde had stayed; she felt no longer "lost." After all, they had brought her up and they stood for her family, all the family left to her. She drew herself up determinedly and, preceded by the concierge carrying her valises, walked toward the elevator.

"How everything's been changed!" she murmured, gazing at the white staircase, the banisters. Old, half-effaced images were crowding back into her brain, fuddled a little by her sleepless night; she felt more bewildered in these changed surroundings, where she looked in vain for some familiar landmark, than she would have been in a house wholly unknown to her.

Half an hour later, having exchanged her travelling clothes for a wrap of flowered cretonne and bedroom slippers, she had settled down with the two maids in Antoine's big dining-room, with a steaming cup of chocolate and a plate of the thick buttered toast of her childhood days in front of her. Resting her arms on the table, she slowly stirred her chocolate, and gave herself up childishly to the satisfaction of the moment. She had never been particularly bright, and convent life in England, with all the activities of each day kept to a strict routine, had not developed her capacities for taking the initiative. When she went slack as she did now, her rounded shoulders, overripe bosom, and rather flabby cheeks robbed her suddenly of all the charm of youth. No longer "Blackie," the graceful gipsylike young creature, she brought to mind a plump mulatto, thick-lipped and vacant-eyed—a woman of slave blood, with all the fatalistic apathy of a servile race.

The two maids had not known what to do with themselves, and Gise's coming was a godsend. Sitting on either side of her, they chattered away to their hearts' content, laughing and weeping turn by turns. They had much to tell Gise about her aunt, Mile, de Waize; every other Sunday, as in duty bound, they went to see her at the Superannuates' Home, bringing a bag of caramels and bananas. Clotilde made no secret of the fact that the old lady was getting "a bit soft in the head," and took no interest now in anything except trivial happenings at the home. Sometimes she greeted her visitors almost rudely and seemed to regard them as intruders about

whose intentions she had the gravest doubts. Usually she packed them off long before the visiting-hour was over so as not to miss her game of bezique.

As Gise listened, her eyes grew blurred with tears. “I must go and see her before I leave,” she sighed.

“You’re leaving, Mademoiselle?” both maids exclaimed at once. They vehemently protested against her idea of returning to England, and explained that M. Antoine had left them enough money to keep house for several months. Adrienne gave a rosy picture of the life the three of them would have together if Gise stayed on in Paris. She had cut out of the morning paper an “Appeal to the Women of France,” inviting them to aid in the defence of their country. There were, it seemed, many forms of useful war work open to devoted Frenchwomen. They could work in day-nurseries for the children of men at the front, could form centres for distributing milk for babies, could cut bandages, join sewing-circles for making soldiers’ garments, and so forth. Every woman was called on to do her bit, and of women’s work there was an abundant variety to choose from.

Gise beamed with pleasure; the idea delighted her. Here was a chance of making herself useful.

Neither the concierge nor the maids had thought to mention Jacques’s name. Gise, supposing him to be in Switzerland, put no question. It was only two days later that a chance remark of Clotilde’s informed her that Jacques had been in Paris on the day of her arrival. Still, she reflected, even had she learned this sooner, would she have managed to get in touch with him? No one knew his address. And, anyhow, would she even have tried to see him again?

# Chapter XX

WHILE he was going up the stairs to the *Etendard* office, before even he had reached the landing, Jacques noticed a milk bottle on Mourlan's doormat.

"That means he's out!" he exclaimed despondently.

He rang the bell. No answer. On the off-chance, he knocked on the door three times, with intervals between each rap.

"Who's there?"

"Thibault."

The door opened. Mourlan was naked to the waist, his hair and beard covered with soap. "Pardon!" he exclaimed on seeing Jenny. "The boy ought to have warned me he had a lady with him." He pushed the door shut with his foot. "Have a seat, lady."

A rush-bottomed chair stood by the door. Jenny sat down in it at once.

The windows were closed and the air reeked of cardboard, paste, saltpetre, dusty paper. Bundles of newspapers tied with string lay everywhere, on the table, on a garden-seat, in a battered tub. In a corner on the floor, beside a pan of sawdust, an antiquated gas-meter, the pipes of which had been cut short and hammered flat, thrust its squat bulk forward like the stump of an amputated leg.

Mourlan had returned to his kitchen. "I've only just got back," he shouted as he soused his head and shoulders under the tap. "I looked like a tramp, my boy." A moment later he reappeared, still scrubbing his head vigorously with a towel; he had put on a clean shirt. "I spent the whole night out in the streets, like the fathead I am. I was pretty scared. Mobilization, I says to myself, that means the cops getting busy, rounding us up. They could search this place for all I cared. I'd made my arrangements, see? They wouldn't have found nothing. But as for getting jugged—well, I'd rather wait a bit. Oh, it ain't that I mind that much being put away for a while," he added with a roguish look at Jenny. "I've never had such peace and quiet as the spells I did in the jug. If it hadn't been for them I'd never have had the time to think up my books, much less write 'em. No, but somehow I didn't like the idea of being in the first batch to get nabbed. Yesterday the dicks were nosing round in all the joints—Pulter's, Guelpa's, even the Eglantine. They know where to look, I'll give 'em credit for that! Only it was just too bad; they didn't find a thing! Only Pierre Martin's manifesto, *An Appeal to Common Sense*, which they pinched just as the comrades were taking the bales from the printer's. You haven't heard the news about Claisse, Robert Claisse, the fellow on the *Vie Ouvriere*—a youngster who'd been permanently exempted from military service? Well, it seems someone set the police on his tracks because he'd written an antiwar leaflet, and he's been put away till the next exemption board has a look at him and they can pack him off to the front line. I heard about that last night. That's a warning for you, my boy, thinks I; don't you be a mug and let yourself get pinched. So I made myself scarce."

"Where did you go?"

"Well, I thought of lying low at one of the comrades' places. Nothing doing. At Siron's 'twouldn't have been any better than here. I looked in at old Guyot's; nobody home. Same for Cottier, Lasseigne, Molini, Vallon. All the boys had cleared out—same as me! So I mooched around town all night, on my lonesome. And this morning when I bought the papers I realized I'd been behaving like an old jackass. So I just trotted home, and here I am!" He swung his shaggy-browed eyes on Jacques. "Have you read the papers, boy?"

"No."

"Eh?" Mourlan's eyes roved to Jenny, came back to Jacques. He seemed tracing a connexion between Jenny's presence and the fact that at ten in the morning on the day following mobilization Jacques had not read the latest news. From the pocket of his black smock, which was hanging on a nail, he took a sheaf of newspapers. Gingerly, with the tips of his fingers, as if he feared to soil his hands, he drew one paper from the wad, letting the others drop onto the tiled floor.

"Have a look at this, my young friend; it'll amuse you, if you've the heart to laugh today. Personally, though I've taken some pretty hard knocks in my time, this one came like a punch below the belt. Think of it! Merle and Almereyda's paper, *Le Bonnet Rouge*, turned mouthpiece overnight of Poincaré and his gang! Well, wonders will never cease! … Yes, read it out, boy."

Bubbling over with rage, Mourlan slipped on his black smock while Jacques read in a low voice.

" 'We are glad to announce, on high authority, that the government will not make use of the police B List. The government has faith in the loyalty of the French people and especially of the working-class. It is common knowledge that the government has spared no efforts, and still is doing its utmost, to preserve peace. The unequivocal declarations of the most inveterate revolutionaries …' "

" 'The most inveterate revolutionaries,' " Mourlan muttered. "Grr! The swine!"

" '… are such as fully to reassure the government. Not one Frenchman will fail to do his duty. By refraining from making use of the B List, the government shows its recognition of this fact.' "

"Well, my boy, what do you say to that? I had to read the darned thing twice before I caught onto what it really means. Well, there's no getting around it; it means this: the French proletariat is joining in their war so cheerfully, and the workers' opposition is so little dangerous, that the government's dropped the notion of interning suspects as a precautionary measure. Get it? It's as good as if they gave us revolutionaries a friendly tweak o' the ear and said: 'Go to it, you young scallawags; we'll overlook your naughtiness! Just toddle off and do your duty at the front.' So our nice, kind government does the sporting thing, tears up the blacklists, chortles to itself, and leaves the suspects at large. Because today, you see, the suspects just don't matter."

He burst into a loud guffaw; there was something terrifying in the sight of the old, saintlike face twisted thus in bitter mirth. "Suspects! There ain't any left. Get it? Well, you can guess the sort of pledges our precious Party leaders had to give, for the government to feel so sure of its ground! To risk an act of generosity like that on the very first day of the war! Yes, our leaders, they've sold us out nicely to the government, damn their souls! This time we're done in good and proper, and there's no getting away from it. The General Staff has the whip-hand. The man that's going to serve in the war won't have a say any longer; that's left to the men who run it."

He took a few paces forward, his hands locked behind his back, under the billowing smock. "And yet, damn it all," he suddenly broke out, spinning round and facing Jacques, "I simply can't believe it! I can't believe we're really licked!"

Jacques gave a slight start. "Neither can I," he muttered. "I can't believe there's nothing more to be done. Even as things are!"

"Even as things are!" Mourlan echoed. "And, better still, in a few days' or a few weeks' time, once those poor devils have had their 'baptism of fire' as they call it. Oh, if only Kropotkin were with us! Or anyone who'd say the things that need to be said, and found a way to get a hearing. Our comrades have given in today because they've been stuffed with lies, because their credulity has been exploited once again. But a mere trifle, the least thing, might bring them to their senses, change the whole position in a moment."

Jacques sprang to his feet as if a whip had flicked his loins.

"What? 'A mere trifle,' you say? What mere trifle?" He strode over to Mourlan. "What do *you* think could be done? Tell me!"

His voice had gone so queer that Jenny turned and stared at him, wide-mouthed, in sudden panic.

Mourlan, too, was startled and fixed his eyes on Jacques, who said uncomfortably: "Yes, I wish you'd tell me; what exactly have you in mind?"

Mourlan shrugged his shoulders with a slightly embarrassed air. "What have I in mind? Just nonsense, likely as not. I let my tongue run away with me, you know, boy—that's how I am! But the whole thing's so damn silly that I can't help hoping still, hoping against hope, as they say. It's plain as day that the peoples of the earth—our people just as much as those against us—have been fooled. And —who knows?—it might be enough …"

He broke off. Staring eagerly at the old man, Jacques prompted: "It might be enough …?"

"Oh, I ain't a very clear idea, you know. But suppose suddenly, like a lightning-flash, there fell between the two front lines a single ray of truth, dispelling the fog of lies! Suppose all at once those poor damn fools facing each other in the firing-lines was to pull their wits together and catch on that they'd been taken in, don't you think they'd rise like one .man, half mad with fury, and turn on the fellows who'd fooled 'em and set 'em at each other's throats?"

Jacques was blinking as if a burst of light had dazzled him. Then, looking down, he walked back toward Jenny without seeming to see her and sat down again.

There followed a moment of constrained silence—as if some eerie happening had befallen, that all three had dimly apprehended but none had fully understood. Mourlan was the first to speak again.

"Anyhow, the whole nation, it seems, is of one mind. In the provinces all the Socialist town councils have passed resolutions declaring that the country is in peril, that it's every Frenchman's duty to defend it, that Germany's outlawed from the ranks of civilization, and so forth. See here!" He picked up the newspapers he had dropped on the floor. "Here's the C.G.T. manifesto. 'To the Proletariat of France' it's called. Do you know what they've the brass to say, our C.G.T. friends? 'The turn of events has taken us unawares. The proletariat has not realized with sufficient unanimity all the strenuous efforts needed to preserve humanity from the horrors of war.' Which means, in plain words: 'There's nothing to be done, boys; you're in for it, and you got to see it through.' Then here's what the Railway Workers' Union—the railwaymen, boy, just think, our diehard railwaymen—have thought fit to post on every wall in Paris: 'Comrades! In this hour of common peril, party differences are wiped out. Socialists, trade unionists, and revolutionaries, all will join in frustrating Kaiser Wilhelm's knavish schemes, all will answer "Present!" when they hear the call of the Republic.' Wait a bit, though! There's better to come. What do you say to this? 'An Open Letter to the Minister of War.' And who do you think it's signed by? Gustave Herve, of all people! Listen. 'Convinced that France has done her utmost to avert war, I have the honour to request that I may be enrolled in the first infantry regiment leaving for the frontier.' And that's that. Yes, my boy, that's how they're turning their coats, our Socialist champions. Our Herve, too, editor of the *Guerre Sociale*, who once declared there never was a country in the world worthy of having one drop of the workers' blood shed in its defence! So it comes to this, my boy: the government's on velvet; it can shelve the B List without a qualm. They've all been brought to heel, our faithful watchdogs of the revolution, one after the other."

Someone knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" Mourlan asked before opening.

"Siron."

The newcomer was a man in the early fifties with a flat face spanned by a grey moustache, a low, wide forehead, deeply sunken nostrils. His eyes, set far apart, had an ironic twinkle. The face gave an impression of quiet energy tinctured with disdain.

Jacques knew him by sight; he was the only man often to be seen about with Mourlan. Formerly a militant trade unionist, Siron had done several spells in jail for his revolutionary activities, but for some years past had been standing apart from the movement. He, like Mourlan, belonged to the group of Socialist free-lances, men of shrewd wits and haughty independence, of uncompromising standards and few illusions, more devoted to the cause than to their comrades, who had no truck with fools and, while universally respected, were looked askance at for their aloofness and apt to be envied for their obvious superiority.

"Take a chair," said Mourlan, though the only chair available was occupied by Jenny. "Have you seen 'their' papers?"

The slight lift of Siron's shoulders seemed intended to suggest at once his contempt for the press and the fact that he had not come here to discuss events.

"There's a meeting tonight at the Jean Bart restaurant." His eyes were fixed on the old printer. "I said I'd let you know. You must come."

"Can't say as I'm so keen on it," Mourlan grunted. "Don't I know just what they're going to …?"

"That's not the point," Siron cut in. "I'll be there myself. There's some things I've got to tell 'em. And I want you to stand by me."

"That's another matter. You've things to tell 'em, eh? What things?"

Siron did not reply at once. He gazed at Jacques, then at Jenny, went to the window, opened it a few inches, then came back to Mourlan.

"Various things. Things that need to be done and which, it seems, no one has the least idea of. We're in a nasty jam, I grant you, but that's no reason to stand by idly and let them have it all their own damned way."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that if the Socialist and trade union leaders think fit to join up with the government, the least they can do is, in return for their collaboration, to insist on getting definite promises that the government will do something for the men they represent. Don't you agree with me? This war has created, in fact, revolutionary conditions. Well, let's turn 'em to our advantage. Jaurés would have seen to that, you bet! He'd have wangled concessions for the proletariat sure enough. And that'd be always so much to the good. This war's going to impose sacrifices, restrictions, on everybody. The least one can demand, on behalf of the workers, is for them to have a voice

in the measures that are going to be taken. There's still time to lay down our conditions. The government, just now, can't do without us. Well, let's insist on a *quid pro quo*. Don't you agree?"

" 'Conditions,' you say. Give an example."

"For instance, we must compel them to nationalize all the munition factories, so's to prevent the owners from profiteering at the expense of the people who're being packed off to the shambles. And the management of the factories must be made over to the unions."

"Not such a bad idea," Mourlan said.

"Another thing is to prevent a rise in prices. It's started already—as we all know. Personally, I see only one way of stopping it, and that's to force the government to take over all the stocks of foodstuffs and the like and arrange for their distribution—cutting out, of course, the middlemen and profiteers."

"That's a pretty tall order, ain't it? It'd need a hell of a lot of organizing."

"Why? The staff is here, all ready to their hand. All they'd need would be to turn the job over to the co-operatives; they're going concerns, and they know the ropes. Don't you agree? Well, all that's got to be discussed. But, now that martial law's been proclaimed in the whole of France, even in Algeria, .the least we can do is to see it helps to protect the little man against the sharks!"

He was stumping up and down the room, which echoed with his clear, level tones. His remarks were meant for Mourlan only, but now and then he cast a fleeting glance at Jacques or Jenny. Beads of sweat stood out on his handsome forehead.

Jacques kept silent. Though he seemed to be attending closely and his eyes were glowing, he was not listening. Lost in the maze of his own thoughts, his mind was leagues away from Siron's projects for the nationalization of factories and the rest of it. What was it Mourlan had said? "Suppose suddenly, like a lightning-flash, there fell between the two front lines just a single ray of truth, dispelling the fog of lies!"

Taking advantage of an interruption by the old printer of his friend's harangue, Jacques rose, beckoning to Jenny.

"Off already?" Mourlan said. "Shall we see you at the Jean Bart tonight?"

Jacques seemed to waken from a dream. "No," he replied. "Foreigners leaving France have got to be out of Paris by tonight at the latest. We're off to Switzerland, she and I. I came to say good-bye."

Mourlan gazed at Jenny, then at Jacques. "Ah? So you've made your minds up? To Switzerland, you said? Good for you." Suddenly he looked extremely moved, though he believed he was concealing his emotion. "Well, well," he added gruffly, "off you go! And try to put in some good work for us over there. Good luck to you, children!"

Jacques felt his mind in such a tumult of excitement and unformulated thought that for the moment he had but one desire—to be alone.

"Now, Jenny dear, please be sensible," he said once they were in the street. He had taken Jenny's arm, and his tone was gentle but firm. "You've still heaps of things to do before tonight, and I can see how tired you are. Go home now. No, don't refuse. You absolutely must have some rest. It's a quarter-past ten. I'll see you home, and then go to the *Huma* by myself. Then, there may be some formalities about your leaving France; I'd better make inquiries. A couple of hours will see me through all that… . Do you agree?"

"Yes."

What he had said about her tiredness was quite true. She felt feverish, exhausted, bruised all over. For a long time she had sat waiting in the little garden by the church, on a hard bench that made her back ache more than ever. It was the place where Jacques had said: "No one has ever loved before as I love you." Lost in a day-dream, she had gone over in memory all that had taken place on that eventful evening, so near and yet already so remote, and on the days that had followed—up to the unthinkable, shattering climax of the previous night… . And when, after two hours of waiting, she had seen Jacques coming down the steps, with a harassed, combative look on his face and absent gaze, she had recognized, with a cruel pang of grief, that their minds were not in unison. She had not dared to tell him of her reverie, and had listened patiently to his account of Antoine's departure. Then she had let him take her on foot to Mourlan's lodgings. Now she was at the end of her tether, too utterly worn out to think of accompanying him elsewhere. All she wanted was to go home, to let her aching limbs relax among the cushions, to rest… .

Though trams were few and far between, they were fortunate enough to catch one, after a short wait, that took them as far as the top of the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Jacques helped her to walk to the street-door.

"Good-bye for the present. I'll be back between one and two." With a smile he added: "And this evening we'll have our last little dinner in a Paris restaurant." But he had not gone twenty yards when he heard an anguished, hardly recognizable voice calling to him from behind: "Jacques!"

He swung round, and in two strides was beside her.

"Mother's back!" She stared at him, wild-eyed. "The concierge stopped me as I was going in. Mother came back this morning."

They gazed helplessly at each other; their minds had suddenly gone blank. Jenny's first thought had been for the disorder in which they had left the apartment, what with Daniel's bed unmade and Jacques's toilet articles lying about in the bathroom.

Abruptly she came to a decision, and clutched his arm. "Come!" A dark, inscrutable look had settled on her face. "Come upstairs with me, Jacques!"

"Jenny!"

"Come!" she repeated, almost harshly.

She seemed so determined and he felt his mind so fogged, his willpower so relaxed, that he made no further protest. She led the way up the flights of stairs almost at a run; she had forgotten her exhaustion and her one idea now seemed to be to get it over as quickly as possible. But at the door she stopped, faltering a little, as she put her key to the lock. In the hush that followed, each heard the other's laboured breathing. Then, bracing herself, Jenny opened the door, caught Jacques's wrist, and, tightening her fingers on it, drew him after her into the apartment.

# Chapter XXI

MME. DE FONTANIN had spent the morning at home, the prey of an unrest such as she had never known before, even at the darkest moments of her married life.

By a kindly chance the door of Daniel's room was shut, and she might almost have managed to persuade herself that she had been the victim of a nightmare, had she not felt a sudden desire for a cup of tea, which took her to the kitchen. On catching sight of the table laid for two, instinctively she had closed her eyes, fled from the place, and taken refuge, in her bedroom.

That first phase of prostration had been followed by one of febrile, irrational activity. Finally, when she had changed from her travelling clothes into an old tea-gown, after tidying up the room and performing the series of more or less futile tasks she had set herself, she resolved to keep absolutely quiet for a while, and settled into her favourite chair beside the window. At all costs she felt she must regain her self-possession. But the little Bible, which she knew would help her to it, was in her valise. Rising, she went to the bookshelf and took the old family Bible, the margins of which had been filled by her father, Pastor de Fontanin, with pencilled notes and comments. Opening it at random, she set herself to read. But her mind was restive, it would not settle on the text and, despite all her efforts, wandered off into a phantasmagoria of scenes and fancies in which thoughts of Daniel grotesquely mingled with her memories of the business men she had dealt with in Vienna, of the complications of her journey, and railway-stations packed with troops. But behind the phantom rout of her imaginings always there loomed up a vision of Jenny and Jacques as she had seen them sleeping in each other's arms. The rumble of troops marching down the near-by boulevards seemed reverberating in her brain like a grim accompaniment to her thoughts. For the first time in her life a feeling of sheer panic, against which she was unable to react, overwhelmed her; a feeling of being caught by a hurricane, swept helplessly away. The Spirit of Evil was let loose in the world, the powers of darkness and disorder were spreading havoc in Europe—and in her home.

Then she heard sounds in the hall, footsteps approaching up the passage. Her face grew rigid; she had not the strength to rise; the most she could do was to straighten herself up in the chair. The door opened. Her cheeks pale as death under the black veil, her eyes distraught, Jenny entered.

The familiar yet unlooked-for sight of her mother in her flowered tea-gown, placidly sitting in her usual chair with the Bible on her knees, stirred Jenny to the depths of her being. Her whole past seemed, after long years of absence, to have suddenly risen before her eyes and, without a thought for Jacques, who lagged behind wondering if he should follow, she ran across the room and flung her arms round her mother. Then, slipping down onto the carpet, she pressed her forehead to her mother's dress.

"Oh, Mamma dear!"

In a flash, love and pity had swept away Mme. de Fontanin's apprehensions; in an access of indulgence her heart softened toward the young people whose secret she had stumbled on so dramatically, and now their conduct seemed no longer outrageous but a very human lapse. Already she was stooping toward the daughter who had come back to her, on the brink of folding her in her arms, prepared to hear her confession, weigh the consequences of what had happened, counsel and befriend her—when suddenly her heart missed a beat. On the wall beyond the open door a shadow had stirred; Jacques had come too, he was about to enter! The fingers resting on Jenny's bowed neck grew tense. Some moments passed while Mme. de Fontanin gazed fixedly at the doorway. The harsh, astringent odour of Jenny's crape veil hovered in the air. At last Jacques's form showed on the threshold, and once again a picture of the two young faces side by side, lost in a dream of remembered pleasure, rose before her eyes.

"My dears! My poor children!" She could hardly bring out the words; her voice was tremulous with consternation—and reproach.

Jacques had crossed the threshold and stood facing her with a look of mingled shyness and bravado. Then in a clear voice she said: "Good morning, Jacques."

Jenny looked up quickly, her face contorted in a strange grimace that, though there was no laughter in it, seemed the expression of a diabolical glee; a hard light that brought to mind a lower instinct shamelessly laid bare shone in the blue depths of her eyes. She stretched her arm toward Jacques, caught his wrist dragged him toward her; then, turning to her mother, said in a voice that tried to be affectionate but had a ring of triumph, with overtones of challenge, almost of truculence: "He's come back to me, Mamma. And for ever!"

For a moment Mme. de Fontanin gazed at each in turn. She did her best to smile, but could not; a faint sigh escaped her lips.

Jenny was watching her mother's face. It was quivering a little, with consternation but with tenderness as well; in its expression, as in the little sigh, Jenny might have found a presage of consent, but that her morbid aptitude to take offence read into it only regret and disapproval. Mortified, her filial love cut to the quick, she drew away from her mother and sprang to her feet with a quick movement that brought her standing to Jacques's side. Her defiant attitude, the glitter of her eyes, told of inordinate pride up in arms and ready to take the offensive.

Jacques, on the contrary, gazed at Mme. de Fontanin with a look of calm, affectionate instancy, and had he spoken, it would have been to say: "I understand your feelings. But you, too, should try to understand ours."

Mme. de Fontanin cast a quick, shy glance at the two young people, then dropped her eyes; that hateful picture of the scene in the bedroom had risen again before her.

There was a long silence. Then, by force of habit, she said, with a courteous wave of her hand to Jacques: "Don't remain standing, my dears. Do sit down."

Jacques drew up a chair for Jenny, then, at a sign from Mme. de Fontanin, sat down on her left.

The few simple words seemed to have cleared the atmosphere. Now that all three were seated in a circle, as at a friendly call, the tension in the air seemed to relax. Jacques found he was able to ask Mme. de Fontanin about her journey back to France in an almost natural voice.

"Didn't you get my last letter?" Mme. de Fontanin asked Jenny.

"No. I haven't had a single letter from you. Not a line. Only this postcard. The first. Written at the station in Vienna on Monday." She spoke in rapid jerks, through half-closed lips.

"On Monday?" Mme. de Fontanin repeated vaguely. The effort of trying to work out the sequence of the days spent in Vienna set her eyelids fluttering. "But I posted two letters every night, one for you and one for Daniel."

Once again the thought of her son made her heart miss a beat.

"I didn't get any letters," Jenny said harshly.

"What about Daniel? Have you heard from him?"

"Yes. Once."

"Where is he?"

"He said he was leaving Lunéville. Since then I've had no news from him."

Again there came a silence, which Jacques, feeling embarrassed, was the first to break.

"And—when did you leave Vienna, Mme. de Fontanin?"

She had some trouble in remembering, then said: "On Thursday. Yes, Thursday morning. But we didn't reach Udine till late that night, and only started off again next day at noon."

"Had they news in Austria as soon as Thursday morning of the bombardment of Belgrade?"

Mme. de Fontanin gazed at him in perplexity before confessing: "I've no idea." During her stay in Vienna she had devoted all her attention to the task of clearing her husband's good name and had paid little heed to what was happening in the world.

A new thought waylaid her. Why, Jenny hasn't even asked if I succeeded in my attempt to straighten up our affairs! And, looking at her daughter, suddenly she put herself a poignant question: Isn't she a wee bit disappointed at my having managed to get back?

Jacques, just to say something, went on inquiring about the mood prevailing in Vienna, about the demonstrations. Mme. de Fontanin did her best to answer; she, too, was clinging desperately to impersonal topics of that order, which postponed the dreaded explanation for the while. For all three at that moment still believed an "explanation" was impending and inevitable.

Jacques kept on turning toward Jenny, trying to draw her into the conversation. But she had ceased even pretending to listen. The stiff poise of her head, the tense expression of the gaunt young face, the harsh aloofness of her gaze, the curious way she had that morning of pursing her lips and holding her chin up, all implied not only a desire to stand apart but a rankling constraint, an estrangement amounting to hostility. Planted on a chair the back of which was too low to give her any support, with her nerves on edge, her body tingling with fatigue, she let her gaze stray casually round the room, sometimes lingering on her mother as on an actress playing a minor part in a stage-setting insubstantial as a dream. It seemed to her as if Mme. de Fontanin had been sitting thus, with her Bible on her lap, in that old armchair upholstered in green velvet and placed eternally at the same angle to catch the light from the window, from the beginning of time; a symbolic figure of the past—pathetic maybe, but, above all, exasperating—that bygone past which gradually, minute by minute, was slipping away from her, fading into the distance, as a group of friends standing on the pier fades from the traveller's view as his ship puts out to sea. Already, she was under way toward far other shores, and in her heart the strong rhythms of the new life beginning for her throbbed like the pulsing of the engines driving the ship ahead. If at that moment Jacques had taken her arm, saying: "Come, leave all this behind for ever," she would have followed him without one backward glance.

In the silence the little clock standing beside Daniel's photograph on the bedside table chimed lengthily.

Jacques glanced at it and, seized by a sudden longing to escape, turned to Jenny. "Why, it's eleven! I must be on my way."

They exchanged a hasty glance; Jenny assented with a nod and was the first to move.

Watching them, Mme. de Fontanin had a particularly painful impression: her Jenny, once so frank and loyal, had changed beyond recognition. She had acquired an evasive manner, a "guilty conscience" demeanour. Yes, for all their pose of assurance, just then they struck her—both alike—as hypocritical, insincere. She saw them eyeing each other with a smug, slightly ridiculous air of superiority, like two augurs solely in the secrets of the gods. And she could not help adding to herself: "Like two accomplices." That was, in fact, true; between them was the intoxicating complicity of their love, which they wished to see as something apart and absolute, unfathomable and unique—unique above all; a love so exceptional that no one but themselves could penetrate its mysteries.

Emboldened by Jenny's approval, Jacques went up to Mme. de Fontanin to say good-bye.

She was flustered by this abrupt leave-taking. Were they really going to leave her thus, with all that mattered left unsaid? How unfair that they should trust her so little! She did her best to think herself into acceptance of this, too—the heartlessness of their behaviour. Perhaps it was she who should have made the first move, prompted them to confide in her. Well, now it was too late. She had not the energy left to make that move. What was more, she felt that, what with physical exhaustion and the emotional shock she had received, her nerves might get the better of her at any moment, she might easily give way to an impulse of ill-humour or injustice. It was best, perhaps, that this first interview should pass off without an explanation.

Still, she found it hard to forgive Jenny, though for the while it was less the moral lapse that weighed with her than Jenny's rebellious attitude, as unaccountable as it was unwarranted. Toward Jacques she felt no resentment; on the contrary, she had been favourably impressed by him throughout their conversation; she had glimpsed behind his shyly deferent manner an unspoken comprehension, and had noted that *his* conscience, anyhow, was crystal-clear, that there was nothing mean or ignoble in his personality. Moreover, he was Daniel's friend and she was ready, if it was God's will, to love him as a son.

So little hostile did she feel toward him that, at the moment of shaking hands, she was on the point of drawing him to her as she would have done with Daniel, and saying: "No, my dear, don't be so formal! Let me kiss you." Unhappily, just then she looked up and saw Jenny's eyes intent on her, shrewd, ruthless, charged with smouldering animosity, and read their silent message. "Yes, I'm watching, I know what's in your mind, and I'm waiting to see if you'll make the motherly gesture I've been expecting from you ever since I brought Jacques into this room." And then Mme. de Fontanin's rankling irritation got the better of her, all her pride was up in arms. No; she would not let herself be browbeaten by her daughter into doing what she was prepared to do spontaneously!

So she merely held out her hand to Jacques, and he alone perceived in the pressure of the trembling fingers all the emotion, the secret acquiescence and affection that went into that commonplace leave-taking.

It was all over in a moment. But as Jacques moved away, accompanied by Jenny, Mme. de Fontanin had a harrowing intuition that, in that fateful moment, all the happiness of her future relations with Jenny had been at stake and that the bond between her and her daughter had been flawed beyond redress. A sudden panic came over her.

"What, Jenny, are you going out too?"

"No," the girl answered curtly, without looking round.

In the passage Jenny clutched Jacques's arm and, without speaking, hurried him into the hall. There they gazed at each other, each reading in the other's eyes a like perplexity.

"You'll come away with me, all the same?" Jacques asked in a low voice.

Jenny gave a start. "Of course!" She sounded as indignant as if he had questioned her love.

"How … how are you going to tell her?" he said after a short pause.

She was standing facing him, one arm raised, grasping a jamb of the old oak cupboard. "Oh," she exclaimed with a quick toss of her head, "nothing matters to me *now!*"

He looked at her in surprise. His eyes roved to the little hand, white against the dark-brown wood, the faintly quivering fingers. He pressed his lips to them.

Suddenly she asked: "Would you take her with us?"

"Whom? Your mother?" He hesitated for the fraction of a second. "Yes, if you think … Certainly. But why do you ask? Do you think she'll want to come with us?"

"I don't know," she replied hastily. "No, I don't expect so. I only wanted to know, in case …" She fell silent, a faint smile on her lips. Then, "Thank you," she said. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Don't you want me to come and call for you here?"

"No."

"What about your luggage?"

"It'll be quite light."

"Will you be able to carry it by yourself to the tram?"

"Yes."

"And my papers? The parcel I left in your room the other day?"

"I'll pack it with my things."

"Right. Then we'll meet at the Gare de Lyon. What time?"

She pondered. "At two. Half-past two at the latest."

"I'll wait for you in the refreshment-room, will that do? We can leave your valise there till the train starts."

She went up to him, took his face between her hands. "My beloved!" she murmured to herself and slowly let her ardent gaze sink into Jacques's eyes, till their lips met and clung together.

She was the first to loosen their embrace.

"Go now." Her voice no less than her face betrayed the tension of her nerves and her utter exhaustion. "Now I'm going back to Mamma. I'll have a talk with her and tell her everything."

# Chapter XXII

NO SOONER had the door of the apartment closed behind him than Jacques felt a resurgence of the nervous unrest that had given him so keen a desire to be alone when he left the *Etendard* office. For a moment he asked himself what was this desperately urgent thing he had to do? Then Mourlan's words came back to him: "Suppose suddenly, like a lightning-flash, there fell between the two front lines just a single ray of truth …"

It came with the blinding light of a revelation. "Between the two front lines." So violent was the impact of the words, so vivid and precise their meaning, that he stopped short half-way down the stairs, dazed and dumbfounded, his pulses racing with newfound hope and purpose. The plan which, for several hours, had been germinating in the depths of his subconscious mind, had risen matured to full awareness and dominated his whole being. It was no vague aspiration, no Utopian dream; what had so swiftly taken form within him was a quite definite programme, feasible single-handed, one of those fixed ideas that strike root in the secrecy of anarchist brains. Now he knew why he was going to Switzerland and what task lay before him there. He knew the decisive act he was to carry out unaided, an act which after these long days of aimless drifting, sterile agitation, would enable him to battle for his faith, declare war on war. An act which would undoubtedly involve the sacrifice of his life. That he had been aware of from the start and accepted without indulging in heroics, without even taking stock of his courage. His sole motive was a mystic faith that this plan of his, for which he was ready to give up his life, was now the one and only way of rousing the masses from their torpor, of abruptly changing the course of events and countering the forces that had combined against the toilers of the earth, against fraternity and justice.

He had completely forgotten Mme. de Fontanin's return, their strange encounter of a moment ago; he had forgotten even Jenny.

It was not so with her. Before going back to her mother's room, she had slipped out onto the balcony to watch Jacques leaving the house, and already she was growing anxious at not seeing him appear. At last she saw him fling out of the portico and, paying no heed to the people on the sidewalk or the busy traffic, dash like a madman across the street in the direction of the Boulevard Saint-Michel. She kept her eyes fixed on him till he was out of sight. But he did not once look back… .

Mme. de Fontanin, after Jenny left her, had let her head sink back, and remained thus for some minutes, stunned and motionless. She could not set her thoughts in order, but one vague, despairing phrase, an echo of her dark forebodings, kept ringing in her brain: "No good can come of it." Before her eyes still hovered the forms of Jacques and Jenny, standing side by side, like twin stems springing from the same root, and by an involuntary association of ideas another picture rose before her: her father's dingy parlour and, standing by the window, Jerome, her young fiancé, in a light-grey, black-braided morning coat that showed his willowy figure to the best advantage, smiling at her with a look of gay, triumphant unconcern. How confidently that day they, too, had faced the years to come! How valiant had been their stand against the family and, with him beside her, how little there had seemed to fear! And in a flash all her illusions, the glamour of those golden days, came back to her; the certainty of happiness in store, the conviction that they were the first to know a love so rapturous. Far from deriving from this evocation of the past an aftertaste of bitterness or even sadness, she felt gloriously exhilarated, as though life had, indeed, fulfillled those promises of bliss!

She gave a slight start when she heard Jenny coming back. Her daughter's resolute tread, the way she closed the door, the strained look on her face, and the unseeing, fanatic eyes seared and burning still with sombre fires, alarmed her.

Love and love alone, she thought, has power to charm away that dark obsession; she murmured nervously: "Come, Jenny darling, come and kiss me."

Jenny flushed a little; on her lips was a lingering savour of Jacques's kiss. She made as if, busy taking off her hat and veil and laying them on the bed, she had failed to catch her mother's remark. Then, overcome by fatigue, she walked across the room to the couch and stretched herself on it.

From where she lay, forcing her voice a little and with rather clumsy eagerness, she cried to her mother: "Oh, Mamma, you can't imagine how happy I am!"

Mme. de Fontanin turned quickly toward her daughter. There had been a note of challenge in Jenny's cry, but her mother's ear had seemed to detect as well an undertone of sadness. That was enough to convince her that she had a bounden duty to fulfill, whatever the risks in doing so. Obeying an impulse which she believed came from Above, she drew herself up.and said almost imperiously: "Tell me, Jenny, have you prayed? Really and truly prayed? And can you say: 'The Lord is on my side'?"

Her mother's words stung Jenny to revolt. The religious issue lay like a gulf between her mother and herself, a gulf whose depth she alone had plumbed.

Mme. de Fontanin went on speaking. "Jenny, my child, cast off your pride. Let's pray together, you and I, and seek help from Him to whom all things are known. With His aid, look into the dark places of your soul. Tell me, Jenny, don't you feel something within you that—that protests?" Her voice shook. "A warning voice that tells you—that perhaps you're making a mistake, perhaps you're lying to yourself?"

Jenny's silence gave her mother the impression that she was communing with herself, about to pray for guidance. But, after a while, the girl said with a sigh: "No, you can't understand." Her voice was harsh, discouraged, hostile.

"No, darling—I *do* understand, I assure you!"

"No, you don't." Jenny's sullen eyes glowed with obstinate irritation; she was finding a morbid pleasure in picturing herself as misunderstood, a victim of injustice. It was on the tip of her tongue to say: "You've no idea of what a love like ours can mean," but she could not bring herself to utter the word "love" aloud. A tight smile pursed her lips. "I saw quite well just now," she said, "that you didn't understand—not one little bit!"

"What do you mean, Jenny? Do you mean I didn't behave nicely to you and him just now?"

"I do."

"But why …?"

"You weren't nice at all." Jenny gazed up at the ceiling; then, sitting up on the couch, she went on in a morose, aggrieved voice. "If you'd understood us, you'd have found something to say to us, something to show you shared our happiness."

Mme. de Fontanin had averted her eyes. After a pause she said: “You’re unjust, Jenny. How can you reproach me with that? When I came here this morning I hadn’t an idea… . You’d kept me in the dark, you’d never told me anything.”

Jenny cut her short with a shrug of her shoulders, a gesture that did not come natural to her and which her mother did not remember having seen her make before (she had picked it up from Jacques). With an obdurate, enigmatic, self-complacent look she said: “I didn’t keep you in the dark. There you are again—you’re accusing me without knowing the truth! Two weeks ago I myself hadn’t the least idea of it.”

“But it’s not two weeks since I left you; it’s just a week today. When I went away you—you ‘hadn’t an idea of it’?”

“No.”

This was untrue; her mother was still in Paris on the evening she had met Jacques at the Gare du Nord. Her head thrown back, she kept her face out of view, but her voice had betrayed her so flagrantly that both women blushed.

“Why, two weeks ago,” Jenny went on, accompanying the words with a brief, constrained laugh to cover her confusion, “if you’d mentioned Jacques to me, I’d have told you that I loathed him and would never consent to meet him again.”

Resting her hands on the arms of her chair, Mme. de Fontanin bent forward impulsively. “Then it all happened in a few days—before you’d had time to think …” She all but said: “and talk it over with me,” but merely added: “… and ask Daniel’s advice.”

“Daniel’s advice?” Jenny echoed in feigned surprise. “Why ever should I do that?” Driven on by a sense of growing exasperation that she would have been hard put to justify—the climax perhaps, though she did not suspect it, of years of affectionate restriction, petty vexations silently endured—she gave again that brief, disdainful laugh. Then, yielding to an unaccountable impulse to wound her mother at the most vulnerable point, she said: “As if Daniel could know, could understand! What would Daniel have said to me? The stupid things that everyone says in such cases! What they call ‘talking sense’!”

“Oh, Jenny!” Mme. de Fontanin implored.

But now there was no holding Jenny. “The things that, I expect, you too are thinking. Why not come out with them? Why not tell me there’s a war on? Or that Jacques and I hardly know each other? Or that I won’t be happy?”

“Jenny!” Mme. de Fontanin gazed at her daughter in stupefaction. The girl before her, with the frowning brows, set features, and shrewish voice, had not the least resemblance to the Jenny who had never left her side during the past twenty years. This new Jenny was the prey, she saw, of instincts that had suddenly broken loose during these last few days. “She’s irresponsible,” the mother thought with a feeling of despair, but at the same time of indulgence, almost of relief.

Her mother’s disapproval, even her obvious distress, far from softening Jenny, goaded her on. “And supposing I tell you I don’t care, I don’t mind being unhappy *with him?* That’s no concern of Daniel’s. That’s my affair and mine alone. I don’t care what other people think. Now that I have *him*, why should I go for advice to anybody, anybody in the world?”

The blood left Mme. de Fontanin’s cheeks as this new blow struck home. What hurt most was her consciousness that Jenny had deliberately set out to hurt her. The Spirit of Evil, the Powers of Darkness, had taken up their abode in her daughter’s heart. She launched a trembling appeal to God. The atmosphere of the room seemed tainted, her power of resisting its morbid contagion was weakening, anger breaking through her self-control. Still, she managed to keep to a tone of quiet firmness for a few moments more.

“You’ve always had your entire liberty of conscience, Jenny. You know it quite well; ever since you’ve been old enough to hear the voice of your own conscience, I’ve never imposed my will on you, never tried to force my ideas on you. And today, too, I assure you, you’re perfectly free to act as you choose, without taking my advice. But I feel it is my duty …”

“Really, Mamma!”

“Yes, it’s my duty to speak to you, to warn you against yourself—even if nothing comes of it. Jenny! Jenny, my dear child, do let me appeal to the better side of your nature. Can you have lost all notion of good and evil? Only open your eyes, try to see things clearly. You’ve been led astray by an infatuation I’d never have dreamed possible. And you’ve come to a point where you give way blindly to your passion, not only without the least remorse but as if you were doing something courageous, something to admire!” Her breath was coming in quick gasps. She had a galling impression that she was too worn out to cope with the situation, that she had taken a wrong line and was not saying the words that ought to be said, or in the proper tone. And perhaps she would have desisted had not the sight of Jenny lying on the couch called up in a hateful spasm of remembrance the picture of two young bodies locked in an embrace on Daniel’s sofa.

“You should be ashamed of yourself!” she blurted out.

“Really, Mamma!” Jenny said again, with an ominous calmness.

“Yes, heartily ashamed of yourself!” Mme. de Fontanin cried again, throwing prudence to the winds. “I’d never have believed it of you—of my little Jenny. That you should take advantage of my being away to—to yield to all sorts of wicked impulses!”

She pulled herself up, feeling that indignation was giving a wrong direction to her words, and swerved off on a new line of argument. “Are a few days enough for making a decision that’s so terribly important, that will shape the whole course of a life? And not your life only, ours as well. Your brother’s life and mine. For don’t you realize it’s our whole future, the future of all three of us, that’s at stake? Did you stop to think of that? No, you—you simply …”

“Stop, Mamma! For pity’s sake, stop!”

“You lost your head. You behaved like a silly child!” Mme. de Fontanin cried in a last, despairing outburst. And the words that had been running through her head all the time rose to her lips: “No good can come of it.”

Jenny felt a cold fury surge up within her like a great wave, lifting her onto her feet. Today she seemed to read her mother like an open book and find there nothing but selfishness, aridity, incomprehension. “Let me tell you something!” she said, walking up to Mme. de Fontanin. “If there’s one of us two doesn’t see clearly into her own heart, it’s you. Yes, you’re thinking all the time of your own future, not of mine. I’ve just made a discovery: that it’s for yourself you’ve always loved me, only for yourself. It’s jealousy that’s setting you against us now. You’re jealous, and you’ve only one idea in your head—to try to keep me with you out of pure selfishness. Well, you’d better not count on doing that. Too late! I’m sorry to have to cause you this distress, but the sooner you know, the better: Jacques is leaving for Switzerland tonight. And I am going with him.”

“What? Tonight? To Switzerland?” Mme. de Fontanin’s voice was barely audible.

“It’s not a sudden fancy; we fixed it all up before your return. It’s the last train that Jacques …”

“Tonight, did you say?”

"Yes, I'll be starting quite soon."

"No, Jenny, you mustn't do that. Really you mustn't."

"Nothing you can say, Mamma, will make the slightest difference." There was a vicious edge to her voice. "No one now can make us change our minds."

"I *forbid* you to go, do you hear?"

Jenny's only reply was a scornful lift of her shoulders.

"Do you hear what I say, Jenny? I forbid, you to go."

"It's no use talking like that, Mother. My mind's made up. In any case, instead of disapproving of me, if you weren't so utterly heartless …" She left the phrase unfinished.

"Utterly heartless!" Mme. de Fontanin repeated weakly. This crudest cut of all made her forget all the rest.

"Yes!" cried Jenny, losing all self-control. "Yes, if you really cared about my happiness, if you loved me for myself, today you'd …"

But Mme. de Fontanin could bear no more. Clasping her forehead with both hands, she stopped her ears with her fingers so as to hear no longer that angry voice shrilling in her weary brain. "Man proposes," she thought, closing her eyes, "but God disposes. Thy will be done."

A sudden noise made her look up with a start. Jenny had left the room, slamming the door. Her hat and veil were no longer on the bed.

"I must pray," Mme. de Fontanin thought, still haunted by the picture of Jenny as she had seen her a moment since, half mad with rage, brazenly defiant.

"O Heavenly Father," she entreated, "help me, give me strength. Nothing is ever past redress. We must never despair of any of Thy creatures." And slowly, twice in succession, she repeated the holy words: " 'Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' "

A dark cloud settled on her mind, but only for a moment; unexpectedly the shadows lifted, and thought began to march again. She remained seated in the easy-chair, her shoulders drooping, her hands clasped, unmoving. But her brain was working with extreme lucidity. She was searching her conscience indefatigably and, as always in time of trial, trying her utmost to analyse her grief and circumscribe its limits, so as to make of it a precise, clean-cut entity, as it were, which could be set apart and committed to the God of infinite compassion.

For her, the worst shock had not been Jenny's hasty decision to go abroad; indeed, she could not quite bring herself to believe it would materialize. What, rightly or wrongly, grieved her more than all the rest was the discovery of Jenny's double-dealing. That was the deepest, cruelest wound of all. Guilelessly she had believed that her affectionate comprehension, the freedom she had allowed Jenny even as a mere child, had created such an atmosphere of mutual trust between her and her daughter that Jenny would never dream of coming to any grave decision without letting her know beforehand and seeking her approval. And now, at the most critical moment of her life, Jenny had kept her in the dark. Taking advantage of her absence, she had behaved in the underhand way one would expect of a girl who had been brought up in conditions of strict dependence and, roused to revolt, had broken loose at last from a state of irksome, unjustifiable subjection. Of course, despite the heated words that had passed between them, Mme. de Fontanin felt no more doubts about her daughter's love than she did about her own love for Jenny. It was her trust that had been profoundly injured. A trust like that which she had placed in Jenny, once it has been betrayed so flagrantly, is maimed beyond redress. She might love her daughter as much as ever, but never again could she trust her as in the past.

The thought of it reduced her to despair. Again she opened her Bible at random. Without much trouble she fixed her attention on the words, and felt her peace of mind slowly returning to her—a peace so strange and unexpected as to be almost ominous. And suddenly, looking into herself more closely, she seemed to discern its latent cause, and her heart sank again. A moment ago there had risen, unsummoned, within her a feeling that was steadily, insidiously gaining ground, a state of mind that she knew only too well, for it had come over her before, during the tragic period of her life when the prospect of further years of futile suffering had seemed too odious to be borne and she had resolved to part from Jerome. Less a mood, perhaps, than an instinctive reaction, like the defensive reflex of a threatened organism. "It's an antidote," she used to say, "that nature in her wisdom creates within us to make certain pains endurable." Putting down the book, she tried to analyse and give a name to the sensation she was experiencing. Resignation, perhaps, or detachment; but most likely there was no one word describing the blend of two so contradictory feelings: affection and indifference. Indifference! The crudeness of the term revolted her. The thought that a mother's love like that which for so many years had glowed within her heart, that such a love may, under the stress of circumstance, grow tainted with indifference (though, for the moment, such a thought might bring a certain comfort), filled her with dismay for the future. Closing her eyes, she banished from her thoughts the after years. And once again murmured: "Thy will be done." But then a flood of grief swept over her again; burying her face in her hands, she wept.

# Chapter XXIII

JENNY was fiercely determined to go, and instinct warned her that, if she was to carry out without faltering this act in which her whole future was at stake, on no account must she see her mother again, or even allow time for thought.

She had run to her bedroom, feverishly bundled into a small valise the few black dresses she possessed, and then, with set lips and flaming cheeks, rapidly put on her hat and veil, and, without even a glance at the mirror, dashed out of the apartment like a hunted creature.

"I'm alone now, and I'm free," she told herself with a sort of rapture, mingled with alarm, as she sped down the stairs. "Now it's absolutely true, I've no one in the world but *him*!'

In the street she felt momentarily at a loss. Where was she to go? Jacques was not due to meet her at the buffet until two, and it was only just past twelve. That couldn't be helped, she reflected; she had her valise with her—the best thing was to go straight to the Gare de Lyon and wait.

She was in luck. Almost immediately a tram came up which would take her to the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where she could change to a line going to the station. She secured a place on the back platform.

"I mustn't let myself think," she kept on repeating to herself. This was the easier to do as all the people in the car were loudly chattering to each other, as people do after an accident. "And the number of marriages, you'd never believe it! Yes, ma'am, the staffs in the registry-offices are being fairly worked off their feet, what with so many boys that have been called up wanting to get spliced before they go." "But what about the formalities?" "Oh, they've been simplified. A good job too. Red tape's *de trop*, as they say, when there's a war on. All you've got to do is to hand in two copies of your birth-certificate and your military service-book and you can make an honest woman of your girl in less than no time." "Well, now, I'm very glad to hear that. It shows the boys who're going to the front want to do the right thing." "Do the right thing? You can trust 'em to do that, ma'am, and at the front as well. No one can say a Frenchman doesn't rise to the occasion when his country needs him." "There's a recruiting-office next door to my house. Well, from the moment it was daylight, all morning, it's been fairly mobbed by fellows wanting to enlist. They're signing up by thousands." "No," a medical officer in uniform corrected him. "Nobody's being allowed to sign up for the present. Those fellows went there to get information, or perhaps to have their names put on the list."

The Bastille tram to which Jenny had to.change was no less crowded; people were standing wedged together in the aisles. However, thanks to the kind offices of a middle-aged woman who, seeing Jenny laden with a valise, told her daughter to give up her seat to the young lady, she was able to sit down.

The rumble of the tram-wheels and the hum of voices had a calming effect on Jenny, but, to escape from her own thoughts, she made a point of listening to the remarks being exchanged over her head.

At the Rue Saint-Jacques the tram stopped to let a company of light artillery go by in the direction of the Sorbonne.

"The whole garrison has marched out of Paris already, so they say, though nobody saw them go." "Yes, one feels there's a firm hand behind it all. Everything's running like clockwork. Those soldiers know their job, eh?" "Sure! By the way it's starting, you can see they mean to make things hum!" "I was on vacation in the Vosges, at Ribeauvillers. Well, let me tell you, when you've seen those fine lads serving on the frontier, the light infantry regiments especially—well, you don't worry." "Still, you can't deny that was a rotten thing to do, retiring ten kilometres from the frontier." "That doesn't matter. When the Boches find they've twenty million Russian bayonets prodding them behind, and us in front …" "The proprietor of my hotel told me a fellow who'd just come from Luxembourg had seen a French airman dive head first on a Zeppelin, and burst it like a soap-bubble." "Got to watch out for false news," the tram conductor observed. "Just now a passenger told me we'd had a decisive victory last night in Alsace." "Well, yes, that's going a bit too far. But I've been told that Boche patrols have been seen round Nancy." "Nancy! Tell us another!" "Any of you fellows hear they've blown up the bridges at Soissons?" "Who's blown 'em up? Our people or them?" "Our people, what do you think?" "Might have been a spy, though." "Yes, the whole place is fairly crawling with spies, so I've been told. The police can't cope with 'em. It's up to each of us to keep an eye on the people about him." "My brother has a job at the Gare d'Or-leans. Well, his wife told us she saw the man who lives in the room opposite hers hiding a German flag under his bed." "Personally," a bespectacled gentleman announced sententiously, "I don't deny that a German has the right to shout: 'God save Germany!' if he wants—provided he doesn't do it in a provocative way. After all, they were born over there; it's not their fault."

There was another stop at the Place Maubert. The road was blocked by a huge crowd, and Jenny saw a band of young men carrying a long beam, battering in a window bearing the sign "Maggi's Dairy."

The passengers in the tram were thrilled. "That's the stuff!" someone cried. "Maggi," the gentleman with the glasses explained, "is a Hun. In fact, he's a cavalry colonel in the German army. The *Action Française* showed him up some time ago. He's been biding his time till mobilization came, to do us a bad turn." "Yes, I hear he poisoned over a hundred kids this morning in the Belleville district with his milk."

Jenny heard the dull thuds of the battering-ram pounding on the iron shutters. At last they caved in with a tinkle of broken glass as the windows shattered into pieces. The crowd surrounding the shop broke into cheers and cries: "Down with Germany! Lynch the traitors!" At a corner of the square a squad of bicycle police had dismounted and were watching the scene without interfering. After all, France had been attacked; people were dispensing rough-and-ready justice—why prevent them?

At last the tram came to the Gare de Lyon. The station entrances were thronged. Carrying her valise, Jenny threaded her way across the crowd to the refreshment-room.

The windows stood wide open and the room was flooded with garish light. Huddled up in a corner, her moist hands clasped, she kept her eyes fixed on the door, though it was far too early to hope for Jacques's arrival. The room was stiflingly hot. After the jolting of the tram, the hard, narrow bench on which she was sitting made her painfully conscious of her aching limbs. Her eyes smarted with the glare. People were running in and out all the time; others hurrying past the window, their baggage piled on porters' trucks which they themselves were pushing. She stopped watching the door for a moment, lifted her valise off the seat beside her, and

stowed it under the table; a second later, she dragged it out, put it beside her again, then resumed her watch over the people coming in—inconsequent behaviour which betrayed the state of her nerves. In the crowded tramcar she had managed to keep her mind in a sort of lethargy; now, left to her own resources, she was at the mercy of the emotions running riot in her heart, and the prospect of having to stay thus by herself, for a full hour quite likely, seemed past enduring. She did her utmost to keep her mind busy with trifles, conjuring up a host of harmless little thoughts, but always she felt hovering round her brain, like a bird of prey wheeling in ever-narrower circles, the nightmare idea that till now she had managed to keep at a distance. To fend it off she fell to examining the objects on the table, counting the rolls in the bread-basket, the lumps of sugar in a saucer. Then she looked up at the door again and watched the people moving in and out. A woman with greying hair came in, noticed an empty table near the door, and sat down at it, burying her face in her hands. And in a flash the idea that Jenny had been warding off swooped down on her, struck home. Before her eyes rose a picture of her mother as she had left her, bowed and broken, her hands clasping her forehead. What was she doing now? Perhaps she had decided to have lunch. With her mind's eye Jenny saw her in the kitchen discovering the table laid for two, the dirty dishes. And now it was she who closed her eyes and, bending forward, pressed her hands to her aching brows.

Some minutes passed before she made a movement. Words she herself had said were echoing in her brain. "You're jealous … utterly heartless." It passed her understanding how she had ever come to say such things, and how, after saying them, she had brought herself to go.

When at last she raised her head her expression was calm, determined; the pressure of her fingers had left marks on her cheeks. "What's the use of thinking about it?" she murmured to herself. "My duty's plain; there's only one thing to do." For a moment yet she remained staring with unseeing eyes in front of her, crushed by the weight of her resolve. On only one point was she still uncertain how to act; should she wait for Jacques to come before she took the momentous step, obeyed the call of duty? But why should she do that? To ask his advice? Had she a furtive hope he would attempt to dissuade her? No, her decision was irrevocable. And, that being so, no time must be wasted; she must not keep her mother in suspense a moment longer.

She called a waiter. "Where can I mail a special-delivery letter?"

"The postoffice is just over there, Mademoiselle, by that blue lamp-post. It's Sunday, but I expect they've stayed open—on a day like this!"

"Look after my baggage, please. I'll be back in a moment."

She ran out of the refreshment-room.

The waiter had judged correctly: the postoffice was open; civilians and men in uniform swarmed at the counters. She bought a special-delivery form and wrote:

> Mother darling, I must have been mad; I'll never forgive myself for the pain I've caused you. I implore you to understand, and to forget. I will stay with you. I've given up my idea of going to Switzerland with Jacques. I don't want to leave you by yourself. He is bound to go. It's the last day he has for leaving Paris. I will go to join him later. With you, I hope. Please, please, don't refuse to go away with me, so that I can be with him again. I ought to have hurried back home at once, to kiss you and tell you all this. But these last few hours before he leaves—I couldn't bear not to spend them with him. This evening I'll be back at home and I'll explain everything to you, Mother dear, so that you can forgive me.
>
> J.
>
> .

She thrust the letter into the envelope without reading it again, with shaking hands. Her whole body was trembling, clammy with perspiration; her underclothes were sticking to her skin. Before putting the note into the special-delivery box, she ascertained that it would be delivered within an hour. Slowly she walked back to the station and returned to her seat in the corner of the refreshment-room.

She asked herself if what she had just done had brought any appeasement to her mind, but found no answer. Her sacrifice had left her in a state of utter prostration like that which follows a copious loss of blood. And so despairing was her mood that now she dreaded Jacques's coming; with Jacques away, she felt surer of being able to keep to her decision. She tried to think herself into reassurance. "In a few days, a week, at most two weeks, we'll be together again." But the prospect of two weeks without him was dreadful as death's instance.

When at last she saw Jacques entering the refreshment-room, she stood up and remained thus, pale, stiffly erect, staring helplessly toward him. No sooner did he catch sight of her than he became aware that something serious had happened.

With a tragic gesture she cut short the question hovering on his lips. "Not here. Let's go outside."

Taking her valise, he followed her out. After a few steps along the sidewalk, amid the busy throng, she stopped abruptly, and said in low, hurried tones, raising on him her haggard eyes: "I can't go away with you tonight."

Jacques's lips parted, but he did not speak. He stooped to set down the valise, and when he looked up again had had time to steady, almost unknowingly, his expression. His horror-struck, incredulous look betrayed nothing of the first thought that had flashed unbidden through his mind. "This means I'm free … to carry out my task."

They were being jostled by soldiers and civilians hurrying to the station; Jacques led Jenny to a recess between two pillars. Then she said: "I can't go away. I can't leave Mamma. Not today. If you knew! i've behaved abominably to her."

She was staring at the ground, afraid to meet his gaze. He was bending toward her, as though trying to help her to speak, his lips quivering, his eyes dark with unspoken thoughts.

"You understand, don't you?" she pleaded. "I can't go now, after what's happened."

"I understand, I understand," he muttered between his teeth.

"I've got to stay with her. For a few days, anyhow. I'll come and join you. Very soon. As soon as I possibly can."

"Yes," he said vehemently, "as soon as you possibly can." But in himself he thought: "No. Never. This is the end."

For some minutes they stood thus, impotent to move or speak or meet each other's eyes. She had intended to confess to him all that had passed between her mother and herself. But it had somehow gone blurred in her mind; she could not now recall how one remark had led on to another. Anyway, what would have been the good? She felt so hopelessly alone in this her personal tragedy; it was incommunicable, Jacques had no place in it, would always remain outside it.

He, too, at this moment felt hopelessly aloof from her. Aloof, indeed, from everyone; the heroic, imaginings with which he had been drugging himself during the past two hours had made him impervious to ordinary emotions. Like a watch that a sudden jolt has stopped, his mind had halted on the first words Jenny had said, his warrant of release: "I can't go away with you." The grief and disappointment conveyed by his demeanour were not feigned, but they were on the surface only. The last impediment had fallen; he was leaving alone, as a free man. Everything had become simple.

She watched him hungrily, thinking: "I shan't be seeing him tomorrow," and was struck by the impression of power that emanated from his face. But in the chaos of her thoughts she did not perceive the nature of the change that had come over him, of the new cast that his resolve had already given his features. Dim with emotion, her eyes lingered fondly on the strong, sensitive mouth, the stubborn jaw, the shoulders, the stalwart, resonant chest on which she had pillowed her head a whole night through. And the thought that she would not be able to pass the coming night in his arms, held in his warm embrace, came with a rush of anguish that was sheer physical pain, pain so intense that, forgetting all, she gave a little sobbing cry: "Oh, my beloved …!"

A sudden gleam that kindled in Jacques's eyes told her how rash she had been thus to betray her emotion. And the memories which that gleam evoked in her gave her a little shiver of dread. She had yearned to sleep again in his arms—no more than that.

The darkly glowing eyes bored into hers. Through lips that hardly moved, he murmured: "Before I go away … our last afternoon … will you, dear?"

She dared not refuse him this last joy. Her cheeks crimson, she looked away with a wan little smile.

Wandering from her, Jacques's gaze roamed for some moments the sunlit square, scanning the high façades on which blazed gilt inscriptions: Hôtel des Voyageurs, Central Palace, Hotel du Depart.

Then, "Come!" he said, taking her arm.

# Chapter XXIV

SAFFRIO glowered at him suspiciously. "Who told you?"

"The concierge at his place in the Rue de Carouge," Jacques replied. "I've just come from the train. I haven't seen anyone yet."

"*Si, si*. Yes, he's been staying with me since he came back from Brussels," the Italian admitted. "He's lying low. I could see he didn't relish the idea of going back to his old rooms, with Alfreda gone. So I said: 'Come and put up with me, Pilot.' His room's upstairs. He lives like he was in jail—lying in bed all day long, reading the newspapers. He complains of rheumatism—but that's only a *pretesto*," he added with the ghost of a smile. "It's so as not to go out and have to talk to people. He won't see anyone, not even Richardley. And how he's changed! You'd never believe it. That bitch, she's just about done him in, damn her! I'd never have thought it possible." He threw up his arms despairingly. "Yes, the Pilot is a broken man."

Jacques made no reply. Saffrio's words came to him through a sort of haze; he could not manage to shake off a feeling of still being in the waking dream that had persisted during the eighteen interminable hours he had spent in the train between Paris and Geneva. To make things worse, he was suffering from a gum-boil which had several times during these past few weeks prevented him from sleeping and which the draughts in the train had aggravated.

"Had anything to eat? Want a drink? No? Well, make yourself a cigarette with this tobacco; it's pretty good, comes from Aosta."

"I want to see *him!*"

"Wait just a *momento*. I'll go upstairs and tell him you're back. P'r'aps he'll want to see you, p'r'aps not. You've changed, too, you know." His soft, caressing gaze lingered on Jacques. "*Si, si*. But you don't listen to me, you're 'thinking war,' eh? Everybody's changed, of course. Tell us what you saw in Paris. So they let you come here? I'm surprised. The most terrible thing, my boy, is the way they've all gone quite crazy, now they're soldiers. Their *furia*, their songs! All the trainloads of men going to the front, their eyes sparkling, and shouting: '*A Berlin!*' and on the other side: '*Nach Paris!*' "

"Well," Jacques said gloomily, "the men I saw leaving for the front weren't singing." Then, as if abruptly wakened from a trance, he broke out excitedly: "What's so terrible about it all isn't that. It's the International. It's done nothing, Saffrio; absolutely nothing! It's played the traitor. When Jaurés died, they all ratted. All, even the best. Renaudel, Jaurés's bosom friend. Guesde, Sembat, Vaillant. Yes, even Vaillant, a man like Vaillant, who had the pluck to declare in Parliament: 'Rather a rebellion than a war!' Even the T.U.C. leaders. To my mind, that's the most baffling thing of all. Yet those men weren't tainted with the 'parliamentary spirit,' and the resolutions passed at all the congresses were perfectly plain: 'A general strike will follow automatically on a declaration of war.' On the eve of mobilization the proletariat was still undecided. They could have brought it off. But they didn't even try. 'Your country needs you.' 'We must stand shoulder to shoulder.' 'We must defend socialism against Prussian militarism.' That's the sort of thing they said—they brought themselves to say. And when people asked them: What are we to do?' all they found to answer was: 'Obey your mobilization orders.' "

Saffrio's eyes were full of tears. "Even here," he said after a short pause, "everything's topsy-turvy. Nowadays the comrades, they speak in whispers. The whole world's changed. People are afraid. The government here is neutral for today; it leaves us in peace. But what about tomorrow? And if we've got to leave, where shall we go? Everybody's nervous. The police have their eye on everything. Nobody shows up at Headquarters. Richardley holds meetings at night in his room or at Boissonis's place. Foreign newspapers are passed round; those who understand them translate for the others. Then off they start discussing, and get all worked up! Over nothing. What can anybody do? Richardley's the only one who goes on working. He has the faith. He says the *Internazionale*, it cannot die, it will resurrect itself stronger than ever. He says that Italy ought to speak right now. He wants the Swiss Socialists to combine with the Italian Socialists and make a start at saving the good name of socialism. Because"—he raised his hands proudly—"in Italy the proletariat, it is faithful. Italy is the true home of the revolution. All the group leaders, Malatesta and Borghi and Mussolini, they are fighting harder than ever. Not only to prevent the government from joining in the war, but to bring peace to the world very soon, by the union of all the Socialists in Europe, the comrades in Germany and Russia."

Jacques thought: But they've not realized that there are quicker ways of bringing peace to the world.

"In France, too," he said aloud, in a quiet, detached tone, as though these matters had ceased to concern him, "you will find some isolated groups who're still holding out. You'd do well to keep in touch with the Ironworkers' Union, for instance. There are individuals as well. You've heard of Merrheim, I suppose? Then there's Monatte, and the Vie Ouvriere group. None of them have knuckled under. And you'd find others like them: Martov, Mourlan, and the fellows on the *Etendard*."

"In Germany there's Liebknecht. Richardley's already got in contact with him."

"And Hosmer, in Vienna. You should be able to arrange through Mithoerg …"

"Mithoerg!" the Italian exclaimed, rising to his feet. His lips were quivering. "Haven't you heard about Mithoerg? He's gone."

"Gone?"

"To Austria."

"What!"

Saffrio dropped his eyes; the handsome Roman features wore a look of naked, uncontrolled, almost animal grief. "The day when Mithoerg came back from Brussels, he said: 'I'm going back to Austria.' All of us, we said: 'Nonsense, man, you're crazy. Why, you already have been sentenced as a deserter.' But he just says: 'That's why. A deserter, he is not a coward. A deserter, he comes back when there is a war. I must go.' Me, I said to him: 'To do what, Mithoerg? Not to join the army, surely?' Then he said: 'No, not to join the army. To be an example. So that they may shoot me dead in front of everybody.' *Si, si*, he said that. And that night he left." The words ended in a sob.

"So Mithoerg did that!" Jacques's voice shook, and a far-away look came into his eyes. For some moments he kept silent, then he turned to the Italian. "Now would you go and tell him that I'm here, please?"

When Saffrio had left the room, Jacques repeated to himself: "So Mithoerg did that!" Yes, Mithoerg had done something, the utmost he could do, to prove that he remained loyal to himself. He had chosen an *exemplary act*, and to it given up his life.

When Saffrio came back he was amazed at the look he caught on Jacques's face, the vestige of a smile. "You're in luck, Thibault. He says he'll see you. Come upstairs."

Following the Italian, Jacques made his way up the spiral staircase that led off from a corner of the shop. When they reached the attic, Saffrio stood aside, pointing to a door at the far end, where a room had been partitioned off with a plank wall.

"He's there. Go in alone; it's better."

As the door opened, Meynestrel looked round. He was lying on the bed; his cheeks were streaming and sweat had matted his black hair, making his forehead look more prominent and his skull smaller. His hand, clasped on a newspaper, dangled beside the bed. A skylight just above him framed a patch of glaring sky, and the air was furnace-hot. The tiled floor was strewn with newspapers and half-smoked cigarettes.

Jacques's friendly smile had won no response from Meynestrel, and his first eager advance had stopped short half-way to the bed. But with a briskness of which a victim of rheumatism would have certainly been incapable—"His rheumatism's a '*pretesto*,' " Jacques thought to himself—Meynestrel had sprung to his feet. He was wearing an aviator's overalls, and the faded-blue collar, open at the neck, revealed a hairy, scraggy chest. He was ill-kempt, almost dirty; the overlong hair curling up on the back of his neck made a sort of feathery ruff, like the plumage on a duck's rump.

"Why did you come back to Switzerland?"

"What was there for me to do over there?"

Meynestrel was standing with his back to the chest of drawers; his arms were folded and he was tugging at his beard, his eyes intent on Jacques. He had developed a new tic; his left eye was continually twitching.

Put out of countenance by this unlooked-for reception, Jacques began talking more or less at random. "You can't imagine, Pilot, what things are like over there. All meetings are forbidden, and there's a censorship in force. Even if it wanted to, no newspaper could publish anything against the government. I saw a fellow on the terrace of a café nearly torn to pieces because he didn't stand up and salute the flag. What's to be done? If one tried distributing leaflets in the barracks, one would be arrested right away. And sabotage, as you know, isn't my line. In any case, what's the use of blowing up an arsenal or a supply train when there are hundreds of other arsenals, thousands of supply trains? No, for the moment, there's nothing doing over there. Nothing!"

Meynestrel shrugged his shoulders. A wan smile hovered on his lips. "There's nothing doing here, either."

"That depends." Jacques looked away.

Meynestrel did not seem to have heard. He went back to the chest of drawers, dipped his fingers in a basin standing on it, and moistened his forehead. Noticing that Jacques had remained standing, there being no chair free, he cleared a stool of the heap of papers of all sorts encumbering it. The unseeing gaze he cast round the room, as he did so, was that of a haunted man. Then he went back to the bed, seated himself on the edge, his arms limply dangling, and heaved a sigh.

Suddenly he spoke. "I miss her terribly, you know." The cool, almost indifferent tone was that of a man drawing attention to an evident fact.

"They shouldn't have behaved like that," Jacques said after a moment's pause.

Again, Meynestrel did not seem to hear. Abruptly he rose and walked to the door, kicking aside a newspaper. For some minutes, dragging one leg like a wounded insect, he paced up and down the room with a sort of febrile listlessness.

Jacques could hardly believe that such a change should have come over the Pilot. Meynestrel seemed to have forgotten his presence and this gave him a better opportunity of observing him. His face had grown leaner, the look of restrained energy and shrewdness had disappeared. The eyes were restless still, but the sparkle had gone out of them; they were curiously mild and, at moments, had a look of calm serenity. "No," Jacques corrected himself at once, "that's not serenity; it's weariness, the unmeaning peace that comes of sheer exhaustion."

"They 'shouldn't,' you said?" Meynestrel's tone was vaguely questioning. Suddenly he stopped pacing to and fro and planted himself in front of Jacques. "If there's one idea I've been effectively cured of—after all that—it's the idea of moral responsibility."

"After all that." Jacques had the impression that Meynestrel had in mind not only what had befallen him personally, the conduct of Alfreda and Paterson, but was thinking, too, of Europe, its statesmen and diplomats, and the Party leaders—himself perhaps included, and his deserted post.

Once again the Pilot walked across the room, then came back to the bed and stretched himself on it, saying in a low voice: "In the last analysis, what man's responsible—for his acts or for himself? Do you know anyone who is? Personally, I've never come across such a one."

A long silence ensued; a dense, oppressive silence that seemed one with the stifling heat, the ruthless glare.

Meynestrel lay on the bed unmoving, his eyes closed. He gave an impression, seen thus, of being taller than his height. A hand with tobacco-stained nails and fingers half clenched as if gripping an invisible ball, rested, palm outward, on the edge of the sheet. The sleeve had slipped back, uncovering his wrist. Jacques stared at the fingers, like the talons of a bird of prey, and the wrist, which never before had seemed to him so frail, so feminine. "That bitch, she's just about done him in." No, Saffrio had not exaggerated. But recognition of the fact did not explain anything; once again Jacques came up against the enigma of the Pilot's personality. Why should a man of his calibre throw in his hand at the very moment when it looked as if at last his hour were going to strike?

Suddenly, without moving, Meynestrel said: "Mithoerg, you know, has gone—to meet his death."

Jacques gave a start. "Each of us can choose his death," he thought. After a few moments he said in a low voice: "That shouldn't be so very difficult when one can make one's death an act, a conscious, final act, that *serves a purpose*."

Meynestrel's hand twitched slightly; the cadaverous face with the closed eyes seemed turned to stone.

Jacques drew himself up and with a fretful movement swept back the lock of hair dangling across his forehead. "Look here!" he said. "This is my plan."

There was sudden resonance in his voice, an accent so compelling that Meynestrel turned his head quickly, opening his eyes. Jacques's gaze was fixed on the skylight, and the light streaming down on his upturned face brought out its look of fierce, invincible resolve.

"There's nothing to be done behind the lines. For the present, anyhow. There's no fighting against the governments; against martial law, press censorship, the patriotic war-fever. But at the front itself it's another matter. It's possible to act upon the man who's being

marched up to the firing-line. And that's the man we've got to get at." Meynestrel made a slight movement which Jacques took as indicating doubt, but which was only a nervous twitch. "No, let me explain. Oh, I know very well how things are today. The 'Marseillaise,' the 'Wacht am Rhein,' roses stuck in the rifle-slings. But what of tomorrow? Tomorrow that man who is singing as he marches to the front will be no more than a poor devil up against the realities of war. A man who's underfed, whose feet are bleeding, who's dropping with fatigue and scared out of his wits by the first bombardments, the first attacks, the first wounds and corpses he sets eyes on. That's the man to whom we can speak. That's the man to whom we've got to say: 'You fool, you're being exploited once again. They're trading on your patriotism, your loyalty, your courage. Everyone's humbugged you. Even the men who had your trust, the men you chose to defend your rights. Now, anyhow, you can see what they wanted of you. Revolt! Refuse to let them rob you of your lives. Refuse to kill. Hold out your hand to your brothers in the opposite lines, men who've been fooled and exploited just as you were. Drop your rifles. Revolt!' " His emotion choked him. He took a few deep breaths before speaking again. "The thing is to find a way of getting in touch with the men at the front. You'll ask me—'How?' "

Meynestrel had propped himself up on an elbow, and in his eyes intent on Jacques there was a hint of irony which he was unable to conceal. The look implied: "Exactly! *How?*"

"In an aeroplane!" Jacques cried, without waiting for the question to be uttered. Then in a lower voice, more slowly, he continued. "We can get in touch with him from the air. We must fly over the front lines, French and German. We must drop on them thousands and thousands of leaflets, in both languages. The French and German Staffs can prevent propaganda from making its way into the soldiers' barracks. But they can do nothing against an avalanche of propaganda dropping from the sky along a front of hundreds of miles. Our leaflets will be broadcast on villages, camps—everywhere troops are massed together. People will read them in France and Germany. And they'll be understood. They'll be passed from hand to hand; they'll find their way into base-camps behind the lines, even into the hands of the civilian population. They'll remind every peasant, every worker, French and German, what he is, what he owes to himself, and they'll tell him what sort of man is facing him in the enemy lines, and that it was a monstrous, unthinkable crime to have launched them at each other's throats."

Meynestrel's lips parted as if he were about to speak. But he said nothing and stretched himself again on the bed, gazing up at the ceiling.

"Oh, Pilot, try to imagine the effect of our leaflets, how they'll stir men to revolt! Why, their effects may be absolutely shattering, decisive! Supposing in a single sector of the lines the opposing troops should fraternize, the contagion would spread like wildfire all along the front. Mutinies everywhere. The General Staffs at their wit's end. The very day I brought off my flight, the French and German High Commands would be held up; no action would be possible in the sector on which I'd dropped my leaflets. And what an example it would be! How it would grip the imagination of the world at large! 'The Peace Plane!' 'A message from the air!' Yes, the victory that international socialism failed to win before the nations mobilized may still be won today. We failed to bring about the union of the proletariat, the general strike. But we can still bring about the fraternization of the fighting-forces."

A brief smile twisted the Pilot's lips. Jacques took a step toward him; he too was smiling with the assurance of unshakable conviction. Without raising his voice, calmly as before, he went on speaking. "There's nothing in all this that's not completely feasible. But I can't do it single-handed. I need your help, Pilot. You know the ropes, you can get the plane for me. And you can teach me in a few days how to fly it—just well enough to travel for some hours in a straight line. The battlefields are within easy reach; it's quite a short flight from the north of Switzerland to the French and German lines in Alsace. No, don't shake your head; I've thought it all out. I've weighed the difficulties and the risks. If only you'll help me, the difficulties can be overcome. As for the risk—for there's only one risk, really—that's my affair." A flush rose to his cheeks, and he fell silent.

After a quick glance to make sure that Jacques had said all he wanted to say, Meynestrel slowly swung himself round and sat up, his legs dangling on the side of the bed. He refrained from looking at Jacques. For a few moments he sat thus, gently stroking his knees. At last he said: "So you think that you, a deserter from the French army, could take a flying-course here in Switzerland without arousing suspicion, do you? And you seriously think that after a few days' training you could take off by yourself, read the maps, pick out your landmarks, and keep the air all on your own, for several hours?" He spoke quietly, with hardly a trace of irony; his expression was inscrutable. Then he raised one hand level with his chin and for some moments examined absent-mindedly the grimy fingernails, one after the other. "And now," he added almost harshly, "will you please leave me to myself!"

Jacques was so taken aback that he halted stock-still in the middle of the room, trying to catch the Pilot's eye and wondering if he had heard aright. Was he really to go away like that, without a word of approval or advice, without a heartening smile?

"*Au revoir*," Meynestrel said in a clear voice without raising his eyes.

"*Au revoir!*" Jacques murmured and began walking to the door. As he was going out, a feeling of revolt surged up in him; he stopped and turned abruptly. The Pilot was watching him, his eyes shining as in the old days; there was a glint of wonder in their depths, but their expression was inscrutable as ever.

"Come and see me again tomorrow." The words came in a rush; Meynestrel's voice, too, had regained its former ring, its rapid, clean-cut enunciation. "Tomorrow morning, kind of late. Make it eleven. And lie low meanwhile. Don't let yourself be seen—by anyone. Nobody must know you're back." And suddenly his face lit up with a most disconcerting smile, a smile of tenderest affection. "Till tomorrow, then, old man."

No sooner had the door closed behind Jacques than Meynestrel murmured half aloud: "After all, why not?" Not that he had any faith in the efficacy of Jacques's romantic scheme. Later on, perhaps, after long months of suffering and bloodshed, possibilities of fraternization between the hostile armies might arise. Still, anything that might undermine morale and sow the seeds of mutiny was, to his thinking, so much to the good.

"Yes, I understand the boy's feelings very well; he's hungering for his slice of heroism, that's what it comes to." He rose, latched the door, and took a few steps across the room. "It's not a bad idea, perhaps," he muttered, as he laid himself again on the bed. "A chance worth snatching at, of … a way out."

# Chapter XXV

RESTING his head on the wooden wall of the compartment, Jacques let the steady rumble of the train vibrate through his body, jarring every sinew, tautening his nerves. He had the third-class car to himself. The air was furnace-hot, though all the windows were open. Dripping with sweat, he had flung himself full length on the seat, on the side away from the sun. And now the clangor of the train changed to the drone of a motor, an aeroplane in flight. With his mind's eye he saw a flurry of white leaflets spinning down in myriads through the bright air.

The wind that fanned his brows was hot, but the flapping blinds gave an illusion of coolness. On the opposite seat lay his bag, bouncing at each jolt of the train; it was a capacious bag faded to a dingy yellow and bulging like a pilgrim's scrip—an old travelling-companion, faithful to the last. Jacques had hastily bundled into it some clothes and miscellaneous papers, without troubling to sort them out, in a mood of utter indifference; he had reached the station just in time for his train. In accordance with Meynestrel's instructions he had left Geneva within an hour, without seeing anyone. Since the early morning he had not eaten, had not even had time to buy a pack of cigarettes at the station. No matter. He had set forth. And this time it was a setting forth anonymous, alone—without return. He would have felt at peace but for the heat, the swarms of flies, the anvil-blows hammering incessantly on his brain. At peace and valiant. The mental anguish, the despairs of the days he had been living through, were left behind.

He closed his eyes, but opened them again almost at once. No retreat from the visible world was needed for him to lose himself in his dream… . Cities, fields, and forests glide by beneath the wings as the plane skims hilltops, dives down into blue valleys. In the cockpit just in front of him sits the Pilot. Bundles of leaflets lie around his feet. The Pilot makes a sign; the plane is flying lower; underneath is a motley chequerwork of blue greatcoats, red trousers, field-grey uniforms. Stooping, he picks up a sheaf of leaflets, scatters them on the wind. The drone of the motor swells to a roar as the plane goes zooming sunward. Jacques stoops and rises, stoops and rises, launching white cloudlets of dancing butterflies. Meynestrel looks back at him over his shoulder; he is laughing… .

Meynestrel! He was back on solid ground again. Meynestrel was the pivot on which his whole endeavour turned. He had just left Meynestrel—and how different a Meynestrel from the "broken man" of yesterday! His shoulders sagged no longer; he was once more the leader born, the man of action, of quick, precise gestures.

When they met that morning the Pilot had greeted him with a triumphant smile. "It's all fixed up. We're in luck. It'll be much simpler than I expected. We can take off in three days' time."

"We?" Still wondering if he had heard aright, Jacques had murmured something about "valuable lives, men who are indispensable to the cause, whom it would be a crime to expose to danger." But the Pilot had cut him short with a rapierlike glance, the sharpness of which was tempered by a slight shrug of the shoulders seeming to imply: "I'm of no use for anything or anyone nowadays." Then he had drawn himself up and, speaking very rapidly, continued: "Let's cut all that out, if you don't mind, old man. You've got to clear out right away—to Basel. For a lot of reasons. If we take off at the frontier, we're over Alsace at once. Now let's fix up our respective tasks. I'll see about the 'bus'; you'll see to the pamphlets. Get the text written, to start with. None too easy, that. But I expect you've thought it out already. Next get it printed. That's a job for Plattner. You don't know Plattner? Here's a note for him. He has a bookshop in the Greifengasse; also a printing-press. Everyone there speaks both languages, French and German, equally well; they'll translate your manifesto for you. Running a million copies in both languages off the presses should mean a few nights' work. Anyhow, see that everything's set for Saturday. That gives you three full days. It's feasible. Don't write to me or anyone; the mail's under observation. If anything crops up, I'll send you news by a man I can trust. The address is in this envelope. Also detailed instructions—and some maps. No, don't look at them now; you can study them in the train. We meet, then, near the frontier; the exact place and time I'll let you know later. Agreed?" Then only, his face had lost its hardness, and a trace of emotion entered his voice. "Right. You've a train for Basel at twelve-thirty." He took a step forward and placed his hands on Jacques's shoulders. "I want to thank you, Jacques. You've done me a tremendous service." His eyes were misted. For a moment Jacques had thought that Meynestrel was going to embrace him. But, on the contrary, the Pilot had withdrawn his hands abruptly. "I'd have been bound to end up by doing some damned silly thing. What I'm doing now may at least be of some use." Then, limping, he had escorted Jacques to the door. "Hurry up or you'll miss your train. *Au revoir*."

Jacques rose and went to the window, hoping for a breath of air. For a while he gazed out at the lake and mountains bathed in August sunshine, a familiar scene that for the last time met his eyes. But his eyes saw nothing of it.

He was thinking of Jenny. Only yesterday, in the train from Paris, each time a thought of her had flashed across his mind, it had brought a stab of unbearably sharp pain that made him gasp for breath. And all his heart had been a mad desire just once again to hold that little head between his hands and gaze into the blue of her eyes, to stroke her rippling hair just once again and watch her eyes grow dim with love under his gaze, her lips slowly parting to his kiss. Just once again to hold that warm, slim, supple body pressed to his! … And then he had sprung up from the seat, gone out into the corridor, clenched his hands on the window-rail, and, leaning forward, exposed his face to the stinging wind, the smoke, the flying cinders—trying to subdue the fever of his blood. Now, however, he could think of her less poignantly; she lay shrined in his memory like the dead body of a passionately loved woman. The ineluctable bears within itself its own appeasement. Now that the end was so near, everything—the days he had lived through at Paris, the emotions of the past week—had suddenly receded to a great distance. He could look back now on his love as on his childhood—a dead past that nothing could resuscitate. And all the future held for him was one wild, crowded moment, a burst of vivid light on his life's horizon.

Unthinkingly he had raised the blind; now he let it fall again. He thrust his hands into his pockets and withdrew them at once, clammy with sweat. The heat, the flies, the din were maddening! He sat down again, pulled off his collar and, slumped in a corner, one arm trailing outside the window, tried to collect his thoughts.

The all-important thing had yet to be done; he had to write that manifesto on which everything hung. It must be a lightning-flash across the darkness, something that went straight to the hearts of men seeking each other's death, something that would carry swift conviction and provoke a simultaneous upsurge of revolt.

Already, disconnected words were jangling in his brain; even scraps of phrases, the clarion-calls of oratory.

"Hostile armies—why 'hostile'? Frenchmen and Germans. The accident of birth. All fellow-men. Workers and peasants, a majority in every land. Workers all. Why enemies? The difference of nationality? But interests identical. Linked together in every way. Everything conspires to make them natural allies."

Taking a notebook from his pocket, he began jotting down phrases as they occurred to him.

> Frenchmen and Germans, you are brothers. All alike, and all alike victims. Victims of the lies dinned into your ears. Not one of you has left of his own accord his home, wife and children, his factory, shop, or farm, to serve as a target for other workers exacdy like himself. All of you alike fear death, all hate the idea of killing, all believe that human life is sacred. All realize that war is folly. There's not one of you but longs to escape from this nightmare war, to get back as soon as he can to his wife, children, and work, to peace and liberty. And yet here you are today, facing each other, with loaded rifles in your hands, ready blindly, at the first word of command, to slaughter men you've never seen, men whom you have no reason to hate, without having any idea why you are being forced to act as murderers.

The train slowed down, stopped. "Lausanne!" Memories flashed across his mind. The *Pension Kammerzinn*, his room with the glossy pitchpine floor, Sophia.

Fearing to be recognized, he resisted the temptation to alight. Holding aside the curtain, he peeped out and gazed at the platforms, the news-stand. Over there was No. 3 Platform—he had walked up and down it one winter night, at Antoine's side, before catching the train that was to bring him back to Paris, to his father's deathbed. It seemed to him now as if that journey with his brother had taken place a full ten years ago.

Two police officers walked by, inspecting the train. An elderly couple entered Jacques's car and settled down. The man, an old artisan with gnarled hands, had put on his Sunday best for the journey. Now he took off his coat and tie, mopped his brow, and lit a cigar. The woman took the coat and, after folding it carefully, laid it on her knees.

Jacques settled himself in his corner and took out his notebook again. Feverishly he scribbled:

> Within less than two weeks, a monstrous collective madness has come over Europe. The press, lying journalists. All nations doped with the same lies. What only yesterday no self-respecting man could bear to contemplate has come to seem inevitable, necessary, and legitimate. Everywhere we see the selfsame crowds of people, goaded deliberately into fanaticism, ready in a white-hot frenzy to spring at each other's throats, not knowing why they do it. To die and to kill have become synonyms of heroism, badges of honour. Why should it be? Who are the men responsible for this state of things?

He took from his pocketbook a folded sheet of paper; on it was a phrase that Vanheede had copied for him from a book on Wilhelm II; an extract from one of the Kaiser's speeches:

> I am convinced that wars between nations are oftener than not an outcome of the ambitions and intrigues of certain statesmen who use these criminal expedients for the sole purpose of keeping in their hands the reins of power and increasing their popularity.

I must get hold of the German original, Jacques reflected, so as to be able to say to them: "Look! That's what your Kaiser himself says." How shall I get it? Vanheede? No; Meynestrel forbade me to write letters to anybody. The public library at Basel, perhaps. But I don't even know the name of the book. Might manage to trace it. No; no time. Still—I've got to find that German original somehow… . He felt the blood rush to his head, fuddling his thoughts. "The men responsible," he murmured blankly. He could not keep still, shifted his position. Annoying, those people in the car! The old woman was following his movements with obvious curiosity. She was in the seat facing him; it was too high for her and her stumpy legs rocked to and fro with the swaying of the train. White stockings, black shoes. To and fro. "The men responsible …" Got to find that original. If that old woman keeps on staring, I'll … She fished out of her basket some plums, a hunk of bread; fell to munching the plums slowly, methodically, spitting the stones into her hand. A wedding-ring glinted. On her forehead a fly settled, flew off, settled again. She did not seem to feel it. Like a corpse… . Intolerable!

He rose to his feet.

How to trace that book? At Basel? No; useless. Waste of time. Too late… . He knew he would never trace it.

Hungering for a breath of fresh air, he went out into the corridor and rested his hands on the window-ledge. Black clouds were massing round the mountain crests. A storm coming. That's why it's so sultry. Seen from above, the water of the lake had the density of quicksilver, and its dull sheen. Thickly sprayed with sulphate, the leafage of the vineyards descending to the water's edge shone a poisonous metallic blue.

The men responsible. When you want to trace an incendiary, the first thing is to discover who will profit by the fire. He mopped his face, took out his pencil again, and, leaning against the door jamb, tried to think himself into indifference—to everything, to the old woman, the suffocating heat, the flies, the noise, the jolts, the landscape, the whole hostile universe around him. Feverishly he scribbled:

> A hidden power, the state, has dealt with you as a farmer deals with his cattle. What is the state? Is the French state or the German state truly and effectively representative of the people, does it stand for the interests of the majority? No. In France as in Germany the state represents a mere fraction; it is the mouthpiece of a gang of speculators who owe their power to their wealth alone and who have under their control today the banks, trusts, public utilities, newspapers, munition factories—everything! They are the absolute rulers of a servile social system that promotes the interests of a favoured few at the expense of the majority. We have seen this system at work during these last weeks. We have seen it crushing like a Juggernaut under its wheels every effort to advance the cause of peace. And it is this same system that's hounding you on

today across the frontier with fixed bayonets, in the defence of interests that are no concern of yours, that actually are ruinous to almost all of you. Men who are being sent to their death have surely the right of asking who stands to profit by their sacrifice, of knowing to whom and to what end they are giving up their lives.

Well, those responsible, in the first place, are the small group who exploit the public—the big business men engaged in ruthless competition with each other, nation against nation; who have no qualms about dispatching the helpless herd to the slaughter-house so as to assure their own privileges and pile up greater and greater wealth. Wealth that, far from enriching the masses and giving them a better life, will serve only to enslave still more completely such of you as escape the shambles.

But these exploiters of the people are not the only men responsible. In every land they've enlisted confederates in the ranks of their respective governments. Among those responsible are these men, their satellites, that handful of windbag politicians, whom the Kaiser himself denounced.

Got to trace that original, he thought again. I simply must get hold of it.

A gang of swindlers, ambassadors, ministers of state, ambitious generals, who, working behind the scenes in Foreign Offices and High Commands, have by their plotting and scheming callously brought you into peril of death, without asking your opinion, without so much as warning you—you, the people of France, and you, the German people, the pawns in their vile game. For that is how things are; in this so-called democratic Europe of the twentieth century no nation has managed to get control of its foreign policy; none of the parliaments you have elected, which are supposed to represent you, is ever informed of the secret commitments which from one day to another may plunge you, every man of you, into the horrors of war.

And behind these arch-criminals, in France and in Germany alike, are all those who, more or less consciously, have made war possible—either by conniving at the wildcat schemes of high finance or by encouraging the ambitions of the politicians by their partisan approval. I have in mind the conservative parties, employers' associations, the nationalist press. The churches, too, are blood-guilty; almost everywhere the clergy plays the part of a spiritual police force acting in the service of the propertied class. Everywhere the churches have played traitor to their spiritual function, and become the allies, or cat's-paws, of the powers of high finance.

He stopped and tried to read what he had written. The strain of gripping the short stub of pencil, his fever, his uncomfortable position, and the motion of the train had made the writing almost illegible.

It won't do, he thought. Too long-winded, too repetitious. I'll have to trim it down. It's got to be terse, compact, if it's to grip their minds. And yet, to start them thinking things over, pulling themselves together, all the fundamental issues have to be included. Difficult!

His legs seemed giving way under him. He thought quickly. Must find a seat. Alone, if possible. He went along the corridor, hunting for an empty car. All full; people talking at the top of their own voices. There was nothing for it; he went back to his old place.

The sun was going down; the car was bathed in a red, angry glare. Prostrated by the heat, the man was snoring, propped on an elbow, his dead cigar still between his lips. The old woman was fanning her face with a newspaper, the coat still spread across her knees. She had looked away as Jacques came in, but now and again he caught her darting a furtive, ill-natured glance in his direction.

Folding his arms, he closed his eyes and counted up to a hundred, to compose his jangled nerves. And suddenly a flood of weariness engulfed him; he fell asleep.

He woke with a start, amazed at having slept. What time was it? The train was slowing down. His travelling-companions were on their feet; the man had put on his coat, relighted his cigar; the woman was closing the lock on her basket. Jacques tried to recognize the station. Berne already?

"*Grützi*," said the man politely as he walked past Jacques.

The platform was crowded; there was a general rush for the train. Jacques's compartment was invaded by a loquacious German-speaking family; mother, grandmother, two small girls, a maid. The luggage-rack sagged under a load of hampers and children's toys. The two women looked tired and dejected. The little girls, whom the heat had rendered quarrelsome, began quarrelling over who was to have the corner seat. These people, Jacques surmised, had been caught by the war on their holiday and were hurrying home; the father, probably, had joined his regiment some days before.

The train began to move. Jacques squeezed his way out into the corridor, which was full of people standing at the windows, mostly men. On his left three young Swiss were conversing in French.

"Viviani's staying on as Prime Minister."

"Who's this fellow Doumergue that's taking over the Foreign Office?"

On his right a young student, his notebooks tucked under his arm, and an elderly man wearing glasses who looked like a professor, were reading the papers.

"Say, what do you think of this?" The young man grinned as he handed his companion the *Journal de Geneve*. "The Pope's had a bright idea, it seems. He's just launched an appeal 'To All the Catholics of the World.' "

"Well, it may be news to you, but there are still several millions of Catholics in the world. And if it was perfectly definite and strongly worded—and if it had been launched *before* this started—well, the Pope's anathema carries weight, you know."

"Read it," the student said. "I suppose you think he formally denounces war, tells off the great powers, and lumps all the nations at war together in one and the same denunciation—something really hair-raising in the excommunicative line! Wait a bit, though! What about apostolic prudence? 'Be ye wise as serpents!' No, all he finds to say to the millions of Catholics who're going to start plugging at each other tomorrow, and who're presumably waiting for orders from His Holiness to put themselves straight with their consciences —what he says isn't: 'Thou shalt do no murder! Refuse to fight!' If he'd done so, quite likely they'd have had to call off the war. No, in a nice paternal tone he says: 'Go to it, my sons! Go to it, but don't forget to elevate your souls toward their Maker'—whatever that may mean!"

Jacques listened with half an ear. A memory flashed across his mind of a priest he had noticed—where was it? At the Gare du Nord, when he'd been seeing Antoine off. A young, athletic-looking prelate, bright-eyed—of the "muscular Christian," "youth leader" persuasion, the recipient, most likely, of some fat advowson—with two haversacks slung across his high-reefed cassock, brand-new mountain-climbing boots, and a sergeant's forage cap rakishly cocked over an ear. The Gare du Nord, Antoine. Antoine, Daniel, Jenny! All these people whom memory involuntarily conjured up, and all these men and women round him, belonged to another world, one that was his no longer, the world of living men, men for whom there was a future, who would continue without him on life's way.

The three young Swiss on his left were discussing with indignation the ultimatum sent by Germany to Belgium.

Jacques moved toward them, listened.

"It was on the posters. A German army corps has crossed the Belgian frontier and is marching on Liege."

A youngish man came out of a neighbouring compartment and joined the group. He was a Belgian, hurrying back to Namur to enlist. "Let me tell you," he said at once, "I'm a Socialist. And that precisely is the reason why I don't stand for right being crushed by might." He launched into a long harangue, raising his voice, declaiming against "German savagery" and vaunting the merits of "Western civilization."

Some other passengers came up. All alike expressed disgust with the brutal methods adopted by the German government.

"Ze Belgian Parliament met zis morning." The speaker, a man in the fifties, had a thick German accent. "Tink you zat ze Socialists vill vote for the var credits?"

"Like one man, sir!" The Belgian rounded on the speaker, the light of battle in his eyes.

Jacques kept silent. He knew the Belgian's forecast was correct. And ragefully he recalled the stand taken by the Belgian Socialists at Brussels, their professions of uncompromising socialism. Vandervelde… . Last Thursday, less than a week ago.

"In Paris, too," one of the Swiss remarked, "it's today the Chamber meets to vote for war credits."

"It'll be the same thing in Paris!" the Belgian cried. "In all the Allied countries the Socialists will vote in the same way. We have justice on our side. This war has been forced on us. In the fight against Prussian militarism the place of every Socialist is in the firing-line." As he spoke, he shot furious glances at the man with the German accent, who held his peace.

"Your Country Needs You! Down with German Imperialism!" The same cry everywhere. In the latest issues of the radical French papers, which Jacques had read the day before, it was the same story: everywhere the Socialists withdrew their opposition to the war. A few sporadic meetings were still being announced as taking place in the suburbs, but they were only to discuss ways and means of providing relief for families whose breadwinners were at the front. The war had become an accepted fact, against which no one protested. The copy of the *Guerre Sociale* which Jacques had read was particularly revealing. On the front page Herve had the audacity to write:

> Jaurés, well for you you are not here to watch the wreck of our dreams. But how sad that you are not among us still to see how nobly our highly strung, enthusiastic race, now as always idealist at heart, has responded to the call of duty! You would have been proud of our Socialist workers.

Still more significant was the "Railwaymen's Manifesto" issued by the Railway Workers' Union, which only a few days before had been so vigorously proclaiming its anti-nationalism.

> In this hour of common peril, party differences are wiped out. Socialists, trade unionists, and revolutionaries, all will join in frustrating Kaiser Wilhelm's knavish schemes, all will answer "Present!" when they hear the call of the Republic.

What irony! Jacques had thought. At last, what had seemed impossible—a united front of all the various leftwing parties in every land—has been brought into being. Brought into being by what? By war! Whereas if it had been created *against war … !* The champions of the Socialist International today are everywhere unanimous in approving of the war, from a nationalist viewpoint. Whereas it could have been prevented if, two weeks ago, they'd agreed to launch a preventive general strike. The last faint echo of independence Jacques had discovered was in the English *Daily News*. It contained an article, couched in the terms of a declaration of political faith, which had been written before Germany's note to Belgium. After protesting against the war-mongering notions that were beginning to be foisted upon the British public, the writer of the article emphatically declared that it was England's duty to retain her freedom of action, her ability to act as mediator, and to stay out of the war whatever happened, even if one of the belligerents showed an intention of sending troops through Belgium. But that was yesterday. Now Great Britain had officially announced her participation in the dance of death, on highly idealistic grounds.

The ringing tones of the Belgian Socialist echoed down the corridor. "Jaurés himself, were he with us, would be the first to set us an example. Why, sir, Jaurés was all eagerness to join the colours."

Jaurés, Jacques mused. Would he have stopped the rot? Would even he have held out to the end? And suddenly a picture rose before his eyes of the scene outside the café in the Rue Montmartre, the silent crowd massed in the darkness, the ambulance… . Jenny's pressure on his arm. The funeral's today. Flowers, speeches, flags, military bands. They've taken over the corpse of the lost leader and are parading it as a patriotic emblem through the streets of Paris, through a city under arms. And if at such a moment no one protests, no rioting takes place, it means that all is over, the Workers' International is dead and done with, may as well be buried with him in the tomb.

For the present, indeed, all was ended in the propagandized cities; behind the lines all the vital cords had snapped. But in the firing-line, Jacques was convinced, the unhappy men facing the grim realities of war were only waiting for a signal to rise and break the fatal spell. One gleam of truth, and revolt would break loose, bringing their long-sought liberation.

Again, disconnected phrases started racing through his mind. "You are young, living men. They are sending you to your death. You're being violently robbed of your lives—and how will they be employed? To furnish fresh capital for the big bankers to pile into their safes." He felt in his pocket for his notebook. But how make notes in all this noise, with all these people moving about? Anyhow, in twenty minutes he would be in Basel. There he would have to go and hunt for Plattner, look for lodgings, a room where he could settle down to work. In a flash his mind was made up. He had done well to sleep. He was feeling fit, clear-headed now. Plattner could wait. It would be idiotic to let this ferment of ideas that had come over him die down unused. Instead of running about the town he would take refuge in a corner of the waiting-room and get down on paper the ideas seething up in his brain, before they had time to cool. In the waiting- room, or why not the refreshment-room? For he felt desperately hungry.

# Chapter XXVI

A HEAVEN-SENT refuge, the third-class dining-room was so enormous that its customers, many though they were, took up only the centre of the hall; at the back it was quite empty.

Choosing a large table flanking the wall, one among several similar tables all unoccupied, Jacques took off his coat and eased his collar. He had eaten a plate of succulent, generously larded veal, fricasseed and served with carrots, and drunk a whole pitcher of ice-water.

Electric fans hummed overhead. The waitress placed on his table writing materials and a cup of fragrant coffee.

A waiter, carrying a tray, was moving about the room. "*Zigarren! Zigaretten!*" "*Zigaretten!*"—yes, rather! After twelve hours' privation the first puff was magical. A heady sense of well-being, a warm plenitude of life, throbbed in his veins, making his hands tremble. Leaning forward, blinking across the smoke, he dashed down the ideas as they came into his head, inconsequently. He would organize later on, when he felt in a calmer mood.

His pen galloped across the paper.

> Frenchmen and Germans, you have been fooled.
>
> This war is being represented to you in both camps not only as a defensive war but as a fight for the rights of nations, for justice and liberty. Why? Because they know well that not one German peasant or workman, not one French peasant or workman, would have let his blood be shed in an offensive war, a war to win new territories or markets.
>
> On both sides they have told you you are fighting to stamp out militarism, your neighbours' militarism, to check their bid for world power. As though there were anything to choose between one militarism and another; as though militant nationalism hadn't had as many champions, of recent years, in France as it has had in Germany! As though both your governments alike had not been deliberately courting the same risks of war! Yes, you have been bamboozled. All of you have been led to think that you were going to defend your country against the dastardly attack of an aggressor nation, while in actual fact both General Staffs, French and German alike, have been studying for years, with the same cynical effrontery, the best method of getting in the first lightning blow. While, all along, in each army alike, the High Command has aimed at reaping the advantage of an "act of aggression," the act at which they now hold up their hands in pious horror, so as to justify in your eyes the war they have deliberately brought upon you.
>
> You have been fooled. The best among you believe in good faith that they are giving up their lives for the cause of justice among the peoples of the earth. Whereas neither justice nor the people of any country have been taken into the least account—except in official speeches—and nowhere have the wishes of the nation been ascertained by a plebiscite. No, you are all being sent to your deaths in consequence of old, stupid, secret treaties, of the contents of which you knew nothing and which, had you known them, not one of you would have endorsed. Both sides have been fooled. You Frenchmen have been led to think that it was your duty to bar the way to the invaders and defend civilization against the hordes of barbarism. You Germans have been led to think that your country was encircled, that its existence was at stake, and its prosperity was imperilled by the greed of outsiders, against whom it was your duty to defend it. German and Frenchman, each of you has been fooled; each of you has believed in all good faith that this war is a holy war—on his side only. Each has felt he owed it to his country to sacrifice unreservedly his happiness, his liberty, his life, to the national "honour" and the "triumph of justice." But you have been fooled. The campaign of lying propaganda has done its work in a few days; you have been inoculated with the war-fever—you, even you, who will be the victims of the war! And you have marched heroically against each other at the first call to arms from your country—your country that was never in any real danger. You did not realize that on both sides alike the ruling-classes were using you, the workers, as their cat's-paw. You did not realize you were being asked to bear the brunt of their criminal schemes, to serve as the small change of conquest, helpless accomplices and victims of their insatiable greed for power and gold.
>
> It is with exactly the same lies that the powers that be in France and in Germany have tricked you. Never until now had the European governments shown such utter lack of scruple and such devilish skill in piling calumny on calumny, suggesting false motives and spreading false news—in a word, employing every method of creating hatred and alarm—so as to make sure of roping you in as their accomplices. Within a few days, without even having been given the time to look around and count the dreadful cost of what was being required of you, you have been herded into base-camps, supplied with equipment, and hounded on to murder and to death. All your rights as free men have been wiped out. On both sides, on the same day, martial law was declared, a ruthless military dictatorship established. Anyone who tried to think for himself, who dared to ask: "What's it all about?" was in for it! In any case, who of you was capable of taking a clear view? Of the true facts you had not been given an inkling; your only source of information was the national press, the official lie-factory! All-powerful within its own closed frontiers, the press had come to speak with a single voice, the voice of the men in command, for whom your ignorance, credulity, docility, were essential to enable them to attain their ends.
>
> Your mistake lay in failing to forestall the conflagration while there was yet time. For, though you had on your side an overwhelming majority of pacifist-minded men, you failed to organize it, to bring it into action when the need arose, and to launch against the war-mongers a concerted movement of all classes in all lands that would have forced the governments of Europe to bow to your desire for peace.
>
> Now, everywhere, an iron discipline has gagged the voice of individual protest. Everywhere you have been reduced to the blind subservience of animals in blinkers. Never before has humanity been brought so low, intelligence so completely stifled. Never before have governments forced men's minds into so total an abdication of their rights; so brutally repressed the aspirations of the masses.

Jacques stubbed out on the saucer the end of his cigarette, which was beginning to burn his lips. Then with a fretful gesture he dashed back the lock of hair dangling on his forehead and wiped his sweating cheeks. “So brutally repressed the aspirations of the masses.” The cadence of the phrase rang in his ears as if he had spoken it aloud, addressing the two armies, which a vivid hallucination had suddenly evoked before his eyes. He felt the same thrill, the selfsame sense of being lifted above himself, above a listening people massed below him, that had at times swept over him in the past when a sudden uprush of faith, of love and indignation, an urgent passion to convince and move men’s minds, had sped him onto the platform of a public meeting and spent itself in a tempestuous flood of oratory.

Without lighting the cigarette that he had taken from his pocket, he let his pen run on again.

> Now you have sampled it, *their* war. You have heard the bullets whining past your ears and the groans of wounded, dying men. Now you can gauge the horrors of the shambles they have in store for you. Already most of you have awakened to realities and deep down in yourselves feel a first inkling of shame—of disgust at having let yourselves be fooled. Memories of home, of the dear ones you were so absurdly ready to forsake, are crowding back into your thoughts. Under the impact of reality your minds are beginning to work again, your eyes are opening. What will it be when you have realized the squalid motives, the lust for conquest and world power, the greed for gain of which none of you will ever see a penny, the stranglehold of high finance—the hidden hand behind this war—what will it be when you realize that it is for the sake of these that you are being asked to lay down your lives?
>
> What have they made of your liberty, your consciences, your human dignity? What of the happiness of your homes? What of the only precious thing a worker has to safeguard—his life? Has the French state, has the German state, the right to tear you away from your families and from your work and dispose of your lives against your most obvious personal interests, against your will, your convictions, your most human, most sacred and legitimate instincts? What gave them this appalling power over you, the power of life and death? Your ignorance. Your apathy.
>
> All that is needed is to stop and think if only for a moment, to make one fervent effort of revolt, and you can still break free.
>
> Are you incapable of it? Will you tamely wait under a storm of shellfire, suffering hideously in mind and body, for the far-off day of peace? A peace which you will never know, you the first victims of the war. Very likely even the younger generation called to replace you in the firing-line and sacrificed like you in “glorious” carnage, will not survive to see that day.
>
> Do not say it is too late, that nothing is left to you now but to see it through and submit like sheep led to the slaughter. That would be a coward’s pretext. And it would be a lie.
>
> On the contrary, this is the moment to throw off the yoke. Liberty, safety, the joy of life—all the happiness that has been snatched from you—you can regain them; it rests with you and you alone.
>
> Take thought, take action, before it is too late.
>
> You have a means, an infallible means, of making it impossible for your High Commands to keep up this fratricidal butchery one day longer. It is—to refuse to fight. To cut the ground under the feet of those in power by a simultaneous revolt.
>
> You can do it.
>
> You can do it tomorrow morning.
>
> You can do it without incurring any risk of reprisals.
>
> But, to bring it off, there are three absolute conditions: that your revolt should be sudden, that it should be general, that it should be simultaneous.
>
> Sudden, because you must not give your officers time to take precautionary measures. General and simultaneous, because your success depends on mass action begun at the same moment on both sides of the frontier. If there were only fifty of you who refused to do their “duty,” inevitably they would end up before the firing-squad. But if you were five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand—if you rose like one man in both armies on your sector, if your movement of revolt spread like wildfire from regiment to regiment, if at last you brought into play the invincible force of the greatest number—no courts-martial could cope with the situation. And your officers, and the governments that have set these officers over you, would in a few hours’ time find that their powers for evil had been scotched, paralysed, smashed for ever.
>
> Try to realize the tremendous importance of this crucial moment in your lives. To regain your independence forthwith, only three things are needed and those three things rest with yourselves alone: your revolt must be sudden, it must be unanimous, and it must be simultaneous.

His face was convulsed; his breath came in quick, strident gasps. He stared up at a window opposite him with unseeing eyes; the world of reality had faded into mist and in a great silence he was contemplating a sea of anguished faces, the legions of doomed men gazing piteously up at him.

> Frenchmen and Germans, you are all men, all brothers. For the sake of your mothers, wives, and children, for the sake of all that is noblest in you, for the sake of that creative impulse transmitted from the dawn of civilization which tends to shape man into a just and rational being—grasp this last chance! Safety is within arm’s reach. Rise up and *act*, before it is too late!
>
> Thousands and thousands of copies of this appeal are being broadcast today in France and Germany, along the whole front. At this very moment, in both camps, thousands of French and German hearts are thrilling with the same hope as yours, thousands of fists are brandished, thousands of men declaring for revolt, the triumph of life over lies and death.
>
> Courage! Do not hesitate! The least delay may ruin everything. Your revolt must break out tomorrow and no later.
>
> Tomorrow, at the same hour, at sunrise, all together, French and Germans, fired by the same heroism and the same fraternal love, throw down your arms and join your voices in a great shout rolling along the lines, the cheers of men set free.
>
> Rise up all together and refuse to take part in the war, compel your governments to declare immediate peace!

Up tomorrow, all of you, with the first ray of dawn!

Carefully he replaced his pen on the inkstand. Slowly he straightened up, drawing back a little from the table. His eyes were lowered. All his movements were gentle, bated, noiseless—like those of a birdwatcher heedful not to alarm his quarry. All the wrinkles on his brow had been smoothed away. He seemed to be waiting for something, for some slightly painful process to run its course within him, for his heart to steady down, the throbbing in his temples to die away, and the arduous ascent toward the world of real things to take place without needless suffering.

Mechanically he gathered together the loose sheets scrawled in feverish haste without erasures. He folded them, smoothed them out, then, on a sudden impulse, hugged them to his breast. For a moment he bowed his head and, without moving his lips, murmured like a prayer: “To bring back peace to the world.”

# Chapter XXVII

PLATTNER had found a room for Jacques in the house of an old woman, the mother of a militant Socialist named Stumpf, who had been sent by the Party on special service. It was given out that Jacques had come to Basel for research work at the public library. Plattner had even provided him with a written contract for such work. Since the outbreak of war the police had been extremely vigilant; thus, if they showed an interest in Jacques's doings, he would be able to furnish proof not only of a residence but of an occupation.

Old Frau Stumpf's house in the Erlenstrasse—a mean street not far from the Greifengasse in which was Plattner's shop—was a ramshackle shanty due shortly to be torn down. The room let to Jacques had the form of a narrow corridor with a low window at each end. One window gave onto the courtyard, from which rose a mingled stench of rabbit-hutches and decaying refuse. The other overlooked the street, with a view across to the coal-yards at the Baden station—German territory, or almost so. The room was immediately under the roof, which was set so low that Jacques could reach it with his hand. The August sun, beating on the tiles all day, kept the room at the temperature of an oven.

In this stifling atmosphere Jacques settled down to the composition of his manifesto. His only meal consisted of the slice of bread and goose-fat that Frau Stumpf put at his door each morning beside a mug of strong black coffee. Sometimes, toward noon, the heat grew so overpowering that he went out in quest of a breath of air. But no sooner was he outside than a craving to return to his hovel came over him and he hurried back. Stretched on his bed, streaming with perspiration, he closed his eyes and eagerly picked up the broken threads of his intoxicating dream… . An aeroplane in full flight, Meynestrel in the pilot's seat, himself in the cockpit reaching down for handful after handful of leaflets and strewing them on the air. The drone of the engine seemed to merge into the pulsing of his blood; that great white bird was he himself, plucking from his bosom the winged words of peace and scattering them upon the world. "Up tomorrow, all of you, with the first ray of dawn!" The various parts of the message had fallen into place; little by little each phrase had taken definite form; he knew them all by heart. And as, lying on his back, he gazed up at the roof, he kept on repeating them to himself. Sometimes he jumped off the bed and ran to his table to modify a paragraph, change the position of a word. Then again he flung himself upon the bed. He was hardly conscious of the squalor of his surroundings, so lost was he in his day-dream. He saw the insurrectionary movement spreading from company to company, the officers excitedly conferring, the N.C.O.'s at their wit's end, communications cut with General Headquarters, punitive measures ruled out as impracticable. And only one thing left to do if the governments wanted to save their face: to arrange an armistice forthwith.

His fixed idea at once played havoc with his nerves and buoyed him up—like the coffee he kept drinking at all hours. He could dispense with neither. When some urgent task such as a brief visit to the library, or even a chance encounter with Frau Stumpf on the stairs, distracted him for a moment from his dreaming, he felt so prostrated that he rushed back at once to his solitude, like an addict to his drug. No sooner had he entered his room than peace came back to him, and not merely peace but a sort of morbid, feverish exhilaration. When at times his hand started trembling so violently that he had to stop writing or when, in the fragment of looking-glass nailed to the wall, he caught sight of his sweating face and saw his sunken cheeks and haggard eyes, it occurred to him—for perhaps the first time in his life—that he was a sick man. The thought made him smile. What did that matter now?

Sleep was impossible in the burning nights; every ten minutes he rose, dipped a towel in the water-jug, and slaked his fevered limbs. Sometimes he lingered at his window, peering out at what seemed like a glimpse of hell. Bathed in a livid sheen of arc-lamps, a horde of wraithlike forms scurried about the wharves in an incessant din; further on, in the gloom of the coal-yards, drays and trucks clattered to and fro, lights flashed out and sped in all directions. Still further on, again, along a glimmering network of rails, endless freight-trains shunted and whistled before plunging one after another into the black night of Germany at war. Then he smiled. He alone *knew*. He alone knew that all this sound and fury was in vain. Deliverance was at hand. The pamphlet was finished. Kappel was going to make the German version of it; Plattner to print twelve hundred thousand copies. Meynestrel was making arrangements at Zürich for the plane. Only a few days more. "Up tomorrow, all of you, with the first ray of dawn!"

After forty-eight hours' feverish work he felt the time had come to turn in his manuscript. "Have everything ready for Saturday," Meynestrel had told him.

Jacques found Plattner at his shop, ensconced among bales of paper in the backroom; its double baize doors were closed, as were the windows, though the morning was well advanced. Plattner was an ugly, unhealthy-looking man in the forties; he had stomach trouble and a bad breath. His thorax jutted out like a bird's breast, and his bald pâté, scraggy neck, and vast hook-nose brought to mind a vulture. The overhang of the enormous nose seemed to throw the whole body out of plumb, pitching it forward, so that Plattner looked always on the point of falling headlong—which gave a feeling of discomfort to all who met him for the first time. But after the first shock caused by his grotesque appearance had worn off, no one could fail to be attracted by the frankness of his gaze, the geniality of his smile, and the gentleness of his rather singsong voice, apt to wax emotional on any pretext and always vibrant with hearty affability. But Jacques had no need for new friends; from now on he stood alone.

Plattner was in low spirits. He had just received news that the Social-Democrats in Germany had voted in favour of the war credits. "That the French Socialists should have supported the government when it came to a vote was bad enough!" His voice shook with indignation. "Still, after the murder of Jaurés, one rather expected something of the sort. But that the Germans, that our German Social-Democratic Party, the greatest proletarian force in Europe, should behave like that—well, it's the hardest blow I've had in my whole career as a militant Socialist. I'd refused to believe the government-inspired newspapers. I'd have laid any odds that the Social-Democrats would, to a man, grasp this opportunity of inflicting a public rebuff on the imperial government. When I read the official communiqués, I chuckled. 'Tomorrow,' I said to myself, 'they'll have an eye-opener!' And then …! It's no good blinking the facts today. Those communiqués were true, damnably true. I haven't heard yet what went on behind the scenes. Likely as not we'll never know the truth. Rayer's story is that Bethmann-Hollweg sent for Sudekum on the twenty-ninth to get him to arrange for the Social-Democratic Party to withdraw its opposition."

"The twenty-ninth!" Jacques exclaimed. "But on the twenty-ninth at Brussels Haase made that speech. … I heard him."

"That may be. Anyhow, Rayer asserts that when the German delegates got back to Berlin, a meeting of the central committee was called and they gave in all along the line. So the Kaiser knew he could go ahead with mobilization, that there wouldn't, be an uprising or a general strike. I suspect the Party had a secret meeting before the Reichstag session—and a pretty stormy one it must have been! I still decline to lose faith in people like Liebknecht, Ledebour, Clara Zetkin, and Rosa Luxemburg. Only, they must have been in a minority, they had to bow to the traitors. Still, there's no getting around it; they voted with the government. Thirty years' hard work, thirty years of slow, painfully achieved progress—all wiped out! In one day social-democracy has lost for ever the good opinion of the proletarian world. In the Duma, anyhow, the Russian Socialists didn't kowtow to Tsarism. All of them voted against war. In Servia, too. I've seen the copy of a letter from Dushan Popovitch; the Socialist opposition in Servia refuses to haul down its colours. Yet that's the one country where there would have been some excuse for taking a patriotic line, with the invader at their gates. Even in England socialism is putting up a stubborn fight; Keir Hardie won't let himself be beaten. I've read the latest declaration of the I.L.P. That's all encouraging, you can't deny it. We mustn't lose heart. Little by little we'll get a hearing. They won't succed in gagging all of us. Yes, our one hope is to stand firm, with all the world against us! International socialism will come to life again some day. And that day it will call to account the men who had its trust and whom the imperialist governments have brought to heel so easily."

Jacques let him ramble on, nodding approval more out of politeness than anything else; after what he had witnessed in Paris, defections of this sort had lost the power of surprising him.

Some newspapers were lying on the table. Picking them up, he glanced idly at the headlines: *A Hundred Thousand Germans Marching on Liége. Britain Mobilizing Fleet and Army. Grand Duke Nicholas Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army. Italy Officially Announces Her Neutrality. Successful French Offensive in Alsace.*

Alsace! He put down the newspapers. So fighting had started in Alsace! "Now you have sampled it, *their* war. You have heard the bullets whining past …" All that withdrew his thoughts from the high remoteness of his splendid dream had become odious to him, and now his one desire was to escape from the bookshop, out into the streets, as quickly as possible.

No sooner had Plattner taken over his manuscript and begun the cast-off than Jacques rose and, brushing aside the printer's expostulations, hurried out.

Once in the street, he walked more slowly, at a stroller's pace. Basel lay before him with its great squares and gardens and majestically rolling Rhine; with its abrupt contrasts of light and shade, of tropical heat and sudden coolness; with its many fountains, at one of which he washed his sweat-soiled hands. The city was ablaze with fiery sunlight, the air heavy with the pungent fumes of heated asphalt. As he climbed a narrow street leading to the cathedral close, a thought came to him of the Basel Congress of 1912. The Miinsterplatz was empty; not a carriage, not a human being, was in sight. The Cathedral seemed to be shut. Its red sandstone walls had weathered to the hue of ancient pottery; it brought to mind an old, discarded terra-cotta reliquary, forlorn in sunlight, huge and futile.

On the terrace overlooking the Rhine, under the chestnut trees, where the shadow of the apse and the swiftly flowing water below kept the air cool, Jacques was alone. Now and again the merry cries of a swimming party, hidden by the shrubbery lining the river-bank, were wafted up to him. For a while he watched the pigeons fluttering among the trees. Never since he came to Basel had he, the loneliest of men, felt himself so utterly alone as now. And this sense of utter isolation, of the dignity and power it conferred, filled him with rapture; it was a condition he would have abide with him from now on to the end. Suddenly an unlooked-for thought waylaid him: "I'm acting as I'm doing only out of despair. To escape from myself. I shan't stop the war. I shan't save anyone—except myself. That's all; this act of self-fulfillment will save me, but me alone." He sprang up, trying to drive away the hateful thought, clenching his fists. "Ah, but surely it's something to defeat them, to have overcome the world. And find escape in death."

Beyond the red-stone parapet and the wide sweep of the river between two bridges, beyond the spires and factory chimneys of the outlying districts, lay fields and forests shimmering in the beat-mist. That was Germany, the Germany of today, a country under arms, already convulsed to its depths by the catastrophe of war. He had a sudden impulse to walk westward to the point where the frontier marches with the Rhine, where within a stone's throw from the Swiss bank of the river he could gaze at a foreshore and a countryside that were German territory.

Through the Saint-Alban district he made his way to the suburbs. The sun was climbing zenithward across a haze of dazzling light. The smart little villas with their neatly clipped hedges, arbours, swings, white tables spread with flowered tablecloths, and green lawns with sprayers playing on them, bore witness that war's alarms had not disturbed the calm of this small oasis set in the midst of storm-racked Europe. At Birsfelden, however, he saw a battalion of Swiss troops in field uniform marching down, singing, from the Hard.

To his right was a wooded hillside. A long avenue, parallel to the river, ran through a grove of saplings; the signpost pointing up it was marked "Waldhaus." On his left, between the tree-trunks, he had glimpses of sunlit green meadows through which wound the Rhine. Jacques walked slowly, his mind void of thought. After his cloistered life of the past few days and, just now, his walk through sweltering city streets, he found a wonderful appeasement in the cool green shadows of the forest. Across a tracery of foliage, beyond a narrow valley, he saw white walls gleaming through the trees. That, he thought, must be their Waldhaus. A footpath leading down to the water's edge branched off the avenue. The nearness of the water made the air cooler still. A moment later he was standing on the river-bank.

Yonder, separated from him only by that reach of limpid light, was Germany.

Germany was empty. On that morning not one fisherman was to be seen on the farther bank; not a peasant in the apple orchards stretching from the riverside and the hamlet of red-roofed cottages nestling round a spire up to the foot of the hills that compassed the horizon. But Jacques discerned, hidden away near the water's edge amid the brushwood of the shelving foreshore, the roof of a hut painted in stripes of three colours. What was it? he wondered. A sentry-box? A picket-post? A customs officer's lookout?

His eyes were held by this foreign countryside, rife with mysterious portents. His hands thrust deep into his pockets, his feet sinking into the water-logged soil, he gazed long and earnestly at Germany—and Europe. Never before had he felt so calm, so lucid, so sure of himself as at this moment when, alone on the bank of the great river fraught with historic memories, he opened his eyes wide upon the world and his own destiny. A day will come, he thought, surely a day will come when at long last men's hearts will beat in unison, all will be equal in a world of dignity and justice. Perhaps it was needful for humanity to pass yet once again through a phase of hatred and brutality before winning through to universal brotherhood. But for me there's no more waiting possible; I've reached a stage when I can no longer postpone the surrender of my life wholly and finally. Have I ever given myself up wholly to

anyone or anything? No, not even to the revolutionary cause. Not even to Jenny. Always I kept back something, some vital part of myself. I've gone through life as a dilettante, a man of half-measures who grudgingly doles out only those portions of himself that he is willing to surrender. Only now I've come to know what it means, the utter self-immolation in which one's whole being is consumed.

Like a cleansing flame the vision of his sacrifice irradiated him. Gone was the time when despair hovered in the background of his thoughts, when he had to struggle daily against an impulse to give up the struggle. Death was no surrender, but the fulfillment of his destiny.

A sound of footsteps in the undergrowth behind him made him turn his head. He saw a man and a woman, woodcutters, both dressed in black. The man had a bill-hook slung on his belt, the woman a basket in each hand. They had the rather dour expression of most Swiss peasants, the frowning gaze and close-set lips that seem to affirm that life is no primrose path. Both shot a suspicious glance at the unknown young, man they had come on loitering in the brushwood and watching so intently what was happening "over there."

Jacques was aware that he had been unwise to venture so near the frontier. Probably the river-bank was being patrolled by customs officers, if not by Swiss troops as well. Beating a hasty retreat, he cut across the bushes toward the highway.

Late in the afternoon Jacques went to see Kappel, who had made an appointment with him.

"Wait for me in the garden," the medical student said to him. "The Chief will be coming at any moment for his evening round. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

The Children's Hospital was a three-story building beside the river, laid out like a sanatorium with sun-terraces on which the patients' beds were set out in rows. It was surrounded by a small garden with ivy-clad walls. Jacques sat down on a white stone bench placed under a clump of trees. The silence round him was broken only by the twittering of birds in the shrubbery facing him and a ripple of young voices in the distance. Now and then he had a glimpse of a white, childish form, as a little patient sat up in bed to greet the nurse on duty.

Steps crunched the gravel. Jacques looked round and saw Kappel approaching. He had taken off his glasses and white surgical jacket, and in a loose-fitting shirt and duck trousers that showed his slim, lithe figure to advantage, looked unexpectedly boyish. His hair was a very pale yellow, his face thin, his skin smooth, translucent. But his forehead was wrinkled like an old man's and there was a singularly mature look in the keen blue eyes that belied his youthful build.

Kappel, who was a German, had never so much as thought of returning to Germany from Basel, where he was studying medicine. In the daytime he worked under Prof. Webb at the Children's Hospital; his nights he gave up to the revolutionary cause. He was a frequent visitor at Planner's bookshop, and Platther had commissioned him to translate Jacques's pamphlet into German in one afternoon. He had not been informed of Jacques's plans, and refrained from putting questions about them.

He took from his pocket four sheets of paper covered with neat, angular German script. Jacques ran his eyes over them. His hands were trembling. Should he speak, should he tell the German of the wild hopes surging through his mind? No. The hour for unbosoming himself to friendly ears was past; he was doomed to solitude and silence, the strong man's lot. He folded the sheets, saying merely: "Thanks."

Discreetly Kappel changed the subject at once, drawing a newspaper from his pocket. "What do you think of this? 'At the Academy of Moral Science M. Henri Bergson, the President, in the course of an address voiced a tribute to the Belgian corresponding members of the Society. This conflict with Germany, he said, is none other than the conflict of civilization with the hordes of barbarism.' Just imagine—Bergson!"

Abruptly he fell silent, as though to listen to some far-off sound.

"It's too stupid! You're not like that, are you? Every now and then, especially at night, I seem to hear a sound of distant booms, the guns in Alsace."

Jacques averted his eyes. In Alsace! Yes, the carnage had already set in over there. His thoughts took a new turn. In this hour when so many innocent men were passive victims, led like sheep to the slaughter, he at least had the proud satisfaction of remaining captain of his fate, of having chosen his death—a death that would be at once an act of faith and a rebel's protest, his last defiance of a world gone mad, and a deliberate achievement bearing his imprint, charged with the exact message he had willed it to convey.

After a pause Kappel spoke again. "When I was a small boy we lived near the jail in Leipzig. One snowy winter evening I heard my parents mention that the executioner had come to town, and a man was to be executed at dawn. I went out into the street without saying a word. The snow lay thick and there was no one about. I kept on walking round and round the prison, all by myself. I couldn't bring myself to go home. I couldn't get out of my head the thought that behind those walls was a man whom other men had condemned to die, who knew it and was waiting… ."

Some hours later Jacques was sitting in a corner of the Kaffeehalle, leaning back on the cool tiles of an old-fashioned stove as he dipped pieces of bread into the steaming bowl of *café au lait* in front of him. He was in a reverie. The air reeked with stale cigar-smoke. A shade-less electric bulb dangling before him like a spider on its thread held his eyes dazzled, hypnotized him, cut him off from all around him.

Plattner had pressed him to stay for supper; Jacques had refused on the pretext of fatigue and, after correcting the proofs of his manifesto, had left abruptly. He liked the bookseller and blamed himself for feeling so unable to show his liking. But he could not face another of those interminable palavers, interspersed with the revolutionary clichés he had listened to *ad nauseam* in Geneva. Moreover, Plattner's conspiratorial airs—his trick of constantly nipping his interlocutor's arm with clawlike fingers, suddenly letting his head droop over his misshapen chest, and finishing his sentences in a confidential mumble—were more than Jacques's nerves could bear just now.

The Kaffeehalle was exactly the place he wanted; dark and unpretentious, with big bare tables of worn deal that had weathered to the hue and texture of brown bread. Sausages and cabbage, soup, thick slices of bread, were procurable at a low price. Here, in default of solitude, Jacques found the next best thing: isolation in the anonymous promiscuity of the crowd.

For the Kaffeehalle was packed that night, as usual, with a curious assortment of humanity. All sorts and conditions of lonely souls, homeless bachelors, young men at loose ends, and vagabonds forgathered here. There were students, too, noisy youths who made

themselves at home, called the waitresses by their first names, and fell to wrangling, as the mood took them, over Kant's philosophy, the Machine Age, prostitution, bacteriology, the war. There were salesclerks and office workers, neatly dressed people who were restrained from broaching conversations with their neighbours by a semi-bourgeois shyness which, irksome though it was, they could not overcome. There were sickly-looking folk whom it was harder to classify: unemployed labourers, convalescents just out of the hospital and giving off a faint smell of iodoform, and victims of an infirmity like the blind man seated near the door with a piano-tuner's outfit on his knees. At a round table in front of the counter three Salvation Army lasses were having a vegetarian meal and exchanging whispered but doubtless edifying confidences under their poke-bonnets. And there were not a few human derelicts, unhappy creatures stranded here on what ebbtide of poverty, crime, or mischance none could tell. Only too glad for once to have chairs to sit on, they crouched over their plates, as though the burden of a trouble-laden past weighed on their shoulders, and laboriously mashed their bread into the soup before setting their spoons to it. They rarely dared to look up, but one of them, the man who had just taken the seat in front of Jacques, met his eyes for a moment. And in his gaze Jacques caught that fleeting gleam which is the secret countersign between the outcasts of the earth: a subtle contact, as it were, of visual waves, swift as a lightning-flash and always transmitting the same question: Are you one of us—a castaway, a rebel, one of life's misfits?

A girl appeared in the doorway and took a few steps into the room. She was slim, walked with graceful ease, and wore a black tailored suit. She seemed to be looking for someone, and unable to find him.

Jacques dropped his eyes. A sudden pang had stabbed his heart. He rose abruptly, all eagerness to escape… .

Where was Jenny at this moment? How was she faring without him, without even news of him except the card he had posted to her at the French frontier? Often and often the memory of her came to him thus out of the blue, bringing a spasm of wild regret, and in the fiery, sleepless nights he strained her phantom hungrily to his breast. Each time the thought of her need for him, of the precarious future to which he had abandoned her, crossed his mind, it was unbearable. But that thought came rarely. Never once had he so much as dallied with the idea of saving his life for her sake. The sacrifice of his love did not strike him as a betrayal; rather, the truer he was to himself, to the man Jenny loved, the truer he felt to his love for her.

Outside was darkness, solitude, an empty street. He strode ahead at a quick pace, not knowing where he went, keeping step with the strong, buoyant rhythm of the pasan pulsing in his heart. He had escaped from Jenny, from everything; he was immune from all emotion but the fervent, purifying exaltation of the hero.

# Chapter XXVIII

HIS first task each day was to carry out an injunction Meynestrel had given him. “Walk past No. 3 Jungstrasse every morning between eight and nine. When you see a piece of red cloth at the window, go to the house and ask for Frau Hultz. Say to her: ‘I’ve come about the room you have to let.’ ”

On Sunday, August 9, as Jacques was turning the corner from the Elsasserstrasse into the Jungstrasse, his heart missed a beat. In full view among the tablecloths and napkins hung out to dry on the veranda of No. 3 was a strip of bright-red cloth.

The street at this point was lined with cottages, each with a small front garden. As he was going up the steps of No. 3, the door slowly opened. In the dimly lit hall he made out the form of a fair-haired woman in a sleeveless white blouse.

“Frau Hultz?” he asked, stepping inside.

Without replying, she drew the door to behind him. The hall was narrow, windowless.

“I’ve come about the room you have to let.”

Quickly she slipped her hand inside her blouse, took out something, and handed it to him. It was a tiny spool of thin, tightly rolled notepaper, like the messages conveyed by carrier pigeons. As he put it into his pocket Jacques could feel the paper still warm from its contact with the woman’s breast.

“Sorry,” she said aloud. “I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake.”

As she spoke she opened the front door. He tried to catch her eye, but she was staring at the floor. He bowed and went out. The door closed at once behind her.

Several minutes later, bending with Plattner over a developing-dish, he deciphered the message.

> Information on operations in Alsace indicates prompt action necessary. Have fixed Monday, August 10, for our trip. Take-off at 4 a.m. During night of Sunday convey leaflets to hilltop N.E. of Dittingen. Procure French ordnance survey map. Draw line between the G in Burg and D in Dittingen. Meeting-place is midway between G and D on open plateau overlooking the railway-line. Look out for plane from nightfall on. If possible, spread white sheets on the ground to facilitate landing. Bring twelve gallons gasolene.

“Tonight!” Jacques exclaimed, turning to Plattner. The only emotion written on his face was that of surprise.

Plattner was a born conspirator. Though physically infirm and prematurely aged by the sedentary life he led, he had a fertile imagination, a gift for prompt decisions, all the qualities that go to make a leader. A thirst for dangerous adventure had always bulked as largely in his revolutionary zeal as actual convictions.

“We’ve thought it all over quite enough during the last two days,” he said at once. “There’s no question of making any change in our plans. The thing now is to carry them out. Leave it to me. You’d better be seen about as little as possible.”

“What about the little auto-truck? Will you be able to have it by this evening? And the driver? Who’s to let Kappel know? There’ll have to be several of us, I should say, to load the leaflets onto the plane without loss of time.”

“Leave it to me,” Plattner repeated. “I’ll see that everything’s ready on time.”

Left to his own devices, Jacques could certainly have taken the necessary steps as well as Plattner. But, after several days of inactivity and solitude, and in his present state of physical exhaustion, it was a relief to let the despotic little bookseller have his way.

Plattner had his plans all set. Among the militant members of his group there was a garage-keeper of Polish extraction who he knew could be trusted. He jumped onto his bicycle at once, leaving Jacques alone in the little bookshop gazing at the developing-dish in which Meynestrel’s letter was still floating.

During the hour he sat there waiting, Jacques made no movement. He had asked the bookseller for a copy of the ordnance map, had unfolded it on his knees and located Burg and Dittingen; then suddenly everything had gone blurred before his eyes. The burden of his imaginings was so overpowering as to make him incapable of coherent thought. For a week he had been living in a dream, wrapped up in the task assigned him. Only incidentally had he thought about himself and the fate awaiting him. But now he was brought inexorably face to face with the fact that in a few hours he was to perform the last act of his life. Mechanically he repeated to himself the words “tonight,” “tomorrow,” “dawn.” Behind them lay the thought: “Tomorrow all will be over.” For he knew there would be no return; that Meynestrel would fly on till his gasolene was used up. What would happen then? The plane would be shot down over the lines most likely, captured. For them, a court-martial, French or German. No defence possible—summary execution. In a flash of cruel lucidity, stiffening with dismay, he gripped his forehead with both hands. “One life is all we have. To cast it away is madness. No, it’s worse—a crime, *the* crime against nature. Every act of heroism is absurd, and criminal.”

Suddenly a strange calm descended on him. The wave of fear had spent itself, and, in so doing, had swept him past a gloomy headland into sight of other shores and new horizons. He saw the war cut short perhaps; mutinies and fraternization followed by an armistice. “And even,” he murmured, “if my effort fails, what an example! Whatever happens, my death’s an *act*, an act that will bring honour back again. I’ll have been faithful unto death, and useful. Useful at last! I’ll have redeemed my life, made up for all the wasted years. And found the peace that passes understanding.”

His limbs relaxed, and now his whole being was pervaded by a restful languor, a gentle glow of melancholy satisfaction. At last he was going to lay down the burden, to have done with this tiresome, disappointing world—with the tiresome, disappointing being named Jacques Thibault. He could think of his life without regret; of his life and of his death as well. Without regret, but with a dull, almost brutish stupefaction so overwhelming that he could not fix his mind on anything else. Life … and death.

Plattner found him seated at the same place, his elbows resting on his knees and his head between his hands. He rose mechanically, murmuring: “Ah, if only socialism hadn’t played false …!”

The garage-keeper, a man with greying hair and a calm, resolute expression, had come with Plattner.

"This is Andreyev. His truck is ready. He'll drive us. There's plenty of room for the leaflets and gasolene at the back. Kappel's been warned and will be here in a few minutes. We'll start as soon as it gets dark."

Jacques, however, whom the coming of the two men had roused from his lethargy, insisted on reconnoitring the road by daylight. Andreyev approved. "Right! I will take you there," he said to Jacques. "I'll go and get my two-seater. That way we'll look as if we were out on a joy-ride."

Jacques turned to the bookseller. "But don't the leaflets need stitching?"

"Most have been stitched already. I'll be through with the rest in an hour or so. I promise they'll be ready for you when you're back."

Picking up the map, Jacques followed Andreyev out.

Plattner went down to his cellar and there, assisted by Kappel, set about packing the leaflets in bundles. There were four pages of printed matter, two in French and two in German, on extra-thin but tough paper.

Jacques had given instructions that the twelve hundred thousand copies should be divided into batches of two thousand, each batch wrapped with a thin paper band that could be snapped with a flick of the finger. The total weight came to a little more than four hundred pounds. As directed by Jacques, Plattner and Kappel next tied the batches together in packages of ten; each of these packages was attached with string tied in a bowknot that could be undone with a single hand. And to facilitate the handling of these sixty packages Jacques had procured some large canvas sacks like mail-bags. Thus the entire load was contained in six sacks, each weighing about eighty pounds.

The Pole's car returned at five. Jacques seemed extremely anxious and upset. "Things look very black. The road through Metzerlen is under surveillance. Hopeless; sentries and customs officers at every turn. The other road, the one going through Laufen, is all right up to Roschenz. But from there on we would have to take a country lane; there's no getting a car up it. We shall have to procure a farm-cart somehow or other. A cart and horse are better anyhow; they can get through everywhere and won't attract attention."

"A cart and horse? That's easy."

Taking a notebook from his pocket, Plattner ran his eye down a list of addresses, then turned to Andreyev. "Come on. You two," he added, turning to Jacques and Kappel, "stay here and finish packing the sacks."

He seemed so sure of himself that Jacques did not insist on accompanying him.

"I can fix up the last sacks," Kappel said to Jacques. "Have a rest and try to sleep a bit. No?" Taking Jacques's wrist, he felt the pulse. "You've a touch of fever. Have some quinine?" When Jacques shook his head, he added: "Well, anyhow, don't stay in this stuffy room. The stink of paste's enough to make one sick. Go out for a stroll."

The Greifengasse was full of families in their Sunday best taking the air. Jacques joined the stream of passers-by. On reaching the bridge he hesitated, then turned left along the esplanade overlooking the river. I'm in luck for once! he mused. What a gorgeous evening! He braced himself up, forcing a smile to his lips. The main thing's not to think, not to let myself get nervous… . Let's only hope they find a cart—and everything turns out all right.

There was hardly anyone about. From the esplanade he gazed down at the moving expanse of water crimsoned by the sunset glow. Beside the towpath at the river's edge a group of bathers lay basking in the level rays, and Jacques paused for a few moments in rapt contemplation of the white forms softly gleaming on the grass. The evening air was full of an aching languor. Jacques felt the tears rise to his eyes and, as he started walking on again, memory lit up facets of the past: Maisons-Laffitte, the banks of the Seine, swimming expeditions with Daniel on bright summer afternoons.

By what paths, what devious ways, had fate led to this journey's end the boy he had been? Had chance played a major part in it? Assuredly not. All his acts hung together; that much he felt convinced of, had always felt convinced of, confusedly but staunchly. The whole course of his existence had been imposed on him by some mysterious directive agency, and, though its compulsion had operated by fits and starts, each phase of his career had followed an inevitable sequence. And now his life had reached his climax—its apotheosis. Death loomed before him glorious with the dying day's effulgence. He had passed beyond fear. Without vain heroics, with firm resolve, joyless but vital and inspiring, he was answering the call. This self-sought death was a fitting culmination of his life. It was the condition of this last act of loyalty to himself, to his instinct of revolt. From his childhood up he had said "No!" It had been the only way he had ever had of asserting himself. Not "No" to life, but to the world. And now he was making his last refusal, saying his last "No" to what men had made of life.

Without noticing where he was going, he had come to the passage under the Wettstein bridge. Overhead passed a steady stream of motorcars and trams—of living men. Before him lay the cool green shadows of a little public garden, an oasis of silence. He sat down on a bench. Footpaths ribboned the lawns and shrubberies of box. Pigeons were cooing on the low branches of a cedar. A woman wearing a mauve apron was sitting on the bench opposite him. Still quite young, she had a girlish figure, but her face was careworn. In the perambulator in front of her lay a baby, pasty-faced, almost hairless. The woman was eating a slice of bread, gazing toward the river; with her left hand, frail as a child's, she was absent-mindedly rocking the carriage, which creaked at every joint. The mauve apron was faded but clean; the slice of bread was buttered; the expression of the woman's face placid, almost contented. There was nothing to indicate extreme poverty, yet somehow everything about her brought home so poignantly the sufferings of an oppressed world that Jacques rose hastily and fled.

Plattner had just returned to the bookshop. His eyes were sparkling; he threw out his chest. "It's all fixed up. I've got a covered cart. No-body'll see what's in it. And a good mare for Andreyev to drive. He used to work on a farm in Poland and knows all about horses. It means slower going, but we can be sure of getting there without being held up."

# Chapter XXIX

TWELVE chimes, midnight, sounded from the tower of the Heiliggeistkirche. The market gardener's cart, which had crawled at a snail's pace through the empty streets of the southern suburb, swung round into the main road leading to Aesch.

Under the thick tarpaulin, lashed down on all sides, it was pitch-dark. Plattner and Kappel, seated just behind the driver, were chatting in undertones. Kappel was smoking; the red tip of his cigarette scored the darkness now and again.

Jacques had wriggled his way to the back of the cart, and was squatting between two sacks of leaflets, doubled up, his arms locked round his knees, trying to quell the tumult of his nerves by remaining quite still and keeping his eyes fast shut.

Planner's voice came faintly to his ears. "Now, Kappel, old man, let's think about ourselves for a change. An aeroplane at this time of night is bound to attract attention. It'll be a ticklish job getting safely away, the three of us, in our cart, without being held up and asked what the devil we were up to… . What's your idea, Thibault?" he added, craning his neck toward the back of the vehicle..

Jacques made no reply. His sole concern was for Meynestrel's landing. As for what might befall the survivors down below, that was outside his range.

Plattner's loquacity, however, was not to be rebuffed. "The trouble is," he continued, "that even if we hide the cart in the bushes we can't feel safe. No, the only thing is to send Andreyev back with the cart before the plane shows up, directly the stuff's unloaded, so that he can reach the highway before daylight."

But Jacques was lost again in dreams of the great adventure. Leaning out of the cockpit, watching flurries of white pamphlets spinning down to earth, settling on fields and forests, on troops standing to for an attack. Shots are whizzing past them; Meynestrel swings round in the pilot's seat, his face streaming with blood, but smiling ironically as though to say: "You see, Jacques, we bring them peace—and by the way of thanks they're plugging away at us!" The machine, one of its wings riddled by gunfire, plunges earthward. Will the papers mention the crash? No, the press is muzzled. Antoine will not hear of it. Antoine will never know.

"Well, what about us?" Kappel broke in on his musings.

"What about us? Why, the moment the plane's loaded up, we'll make ourselves scarce, and get home cross-country as best we can."

"All right," Kappel said.

The cart seemed now to be travelling along a level patch of road, for the mare had broken into a jog-trot. The body of the cart, perched on high springs and lightly loaded, rocked from side to side; the monotonous swaying motion and the darkness were conducive to silence, to sleep. Kappel stubbed out his cigarette and stretched his legs across the sacks.

"Good night, all."

After a moment, Plattner grunted: "Andreyev's a damned fool. At the rate he's driving, we'll get there much too early."

As Kappel made no comment, Plattner turned to Jacques. "The longer we have to wait, the greater the risk of our being spotted, don't you agree? … Say, are you asleep?"

Jacques had not heard a word. Another scene had taken form before his mind's eye. He saw himself standing alone in a great hall, wearing the canvas uniform he used to wear at the reformatory. In front of him, seated in a semicircle, were the officers of the court-martial. To them he spoke, holding his head high and rapping out every syllable. "I know what is in store for me, but I shall avail myself of the prisoner's last right. You shall not send me to the firing-squad before you've heard me out." The scene was the big medieval hall of a Law Court, with an elaborately coffered ceiling, its panels picked out with gold. The presiding general was ensconced in a thronelike chair in the centre of the courtroom. He was none other than M. Faisme, Superintendent of the Crouy Reformatory. He had volunteered for active service, presumably, and been made a general forthwith. The little man was as dapper as ever with his fair hair, plump, clean-shaven, well-powdered cheeks, and spectacles that hid the expression of his eyes, and cut a handsome figure in his black frogged dolman trimmed with astrakhan. At a small table on a lower level were seated side by side two disabled old veterans, their tunics coruscating with medals. They kept scribbling away without a moment's pause, their wooden legs stretched stiffly under the table. "I am not attempting to justify my conduct. There is no need for self-justification when a man has acted according to his conscience. But it is well that all who are present here should learn the truth from one about to die." His fingers tightened on the railing clamped to the floor-boards in front of him. He had an impression of tiers and tiers of seats behind him, crowded with sightseers, like the arena of a bull-ring. Jenny was there too. She was sitting all alone, pale, aloof, at the end of one of the rows. She had on a mauve apron and there was a baby-carriage in front of her. But he was careful not to look round. His words were not for her. Nor were they meant for the invisible multitude whose eerie silence and rapt attention weighed like a monstrous burden on his back. They were not even meant for the row of officers staring intently at him. His words were solely for the man who had so often humiliated him in the past. He gazed fixedly at M. Faisme's impassive face, yet somehow never could catch his eye. He could not even feel sure that the man's eyes were open; the flashing glasses and the shadow cast by the cap-peak made it impossible to tell. How well Jacques recalled the malignant gleams that used to flicker in the grey depths of those piglike eyes! Yes, judging by the features' statuelike repose, it seemed certain that the eyelids were fast closed. Face to face with the superintendent, how utterly alone he felt! Alone in the world, with only his dog for company, the lame mongrel he had picked up on the Hamburg docks. If only Antoine came along, *he* would somehow or other force M. Faîsme to open his eyes! Yes, he was utterly alone, alone against them all. All alike—generals, veteran colonels, the nondescript crowd of onlookers, yes, and even Jenny herself—all looked on him as an accused man, brought to book for his misdeeds. The absurdity of it! He was greater, truer to an ideal, than any of these people claiming the right to sit in judgment on him.

He was facing the whole social system. He heard his voice ringing through the silence of the courtroom.

"There is a higher law than yours, the law of conscience. My conscience speaks louder than all your rules and regulations. I had the choice between a futile sacrifice of my life on your battlefields and a sacrifice of my life as a rebel fighting for the freedom of the men you have hoodwinked. I have made my choice; I have accepted death—but not in your service. I die because this is the only means you have left me of fighting to the end for the one thing that, despite your hymns of hate, still has value in my eyes—the brotherhood

of man." At the close of each phrase the little handrail clamped to the floor trembled in his grip. "I have made my choice. I know what is in store for me." A sudden vision of the firing-squad, rifles levelled at his breast, sent a shiver down his spine. In the front rank he saw the faces of Pagès and Jumelin. Raising his head, he found himself back in the court-martial room. The execution scene had been so vivid that his face was still convulsed; somehow he managed to twist the look of horror into a sardonic grin. He gazed at each officer in turn. Then his eyes came back to M. Faîsme, and he stared at him intently, as he used to do at the reformatory, trying with mingled apprehension and bravado to detect what lay behind the superintendent's ominous silence. In harsh, biting tones he addressed the court again. "Yes, I know what's in store for me. But do you know what's in store for you, I wonder? You think yourselves the stronger, do you? So you are—today. At a sign from you the rifles will speak and you'll be able to boast of having silenced me for ever. But, merely by removing me, you won't avert what's coming to you! My message will outlive me. Tomorrow it will have consequences of which you do not dream today. And even if my appeal finds no response, the nations you have plunged into the shambles will wake up sooner or later to the truth and come to their senses. When I am dead, there will rise up against you in their thousands men like myself, armed with the might of their consciences and the assurance of their solidarity. For you have up against you and your criminal social system something that is intrinsically human, vital, and backed by the spiritual forces of mankind, and all your pains and penalties cannot prevail against it. The march of time, the progress of the world will break you in the end—infallibly! International socialism is forging ahead. I grant you it has faltered on this occasion, and you have ruthlessly taken advantage of its lapse. Yes, you have successfully put through your mobilization. But, I warn you, have no illusions about this triumph of a day! You will not turn back the rising tide, and in the end, inevitably, internationalism will sweep you away, sweep you and all your like from the face of the earth… . Do not hope to stem that tide with my dead body." He peered up at M. Faîsme's face; it was inscrutable as ever, like a blind mask of wax, the lips faintly curled, with the enigmatic, smiling aloofness of the Buddha. Jacques was trembling with rage. Somehow, at all costs, he must shake that man, his enemy, out of his bland indifference, force his attention if only for a moment! Suddenly he shouted furiously: "M. Faîsme, look at me! Do you hear, sir?"

"What's up? Did you call me?"—Plattner's voice.

At last the general's eyes had opened. Their gaze was soulless as the gaze a man dying in the hospital meets in the eyes of the professional ward-attendant going his rounds; eyes for which the man in his last agony is already no more than another corpse awaiting its turn for the mortuary. And suddenly a hideous thought flashed through Jacques's mind. "He'll have my poor dog shot as well." His eyes fell on the general's orderly; it was Arthur, the warder who had made his life unbearable at Crouy. "And it's Arthur he'll order to do it!"

"What did you say?"—Plattner's voice again. As no answer came, Plattner reached across the darkness and tapped Jacques's leg. Jacques opened his eyes. But what he saw first over his head was not the tarpaulin but the gilded panels of the courthouse ceiling. Gradually consciousness of his surroundings came back to him. He was in a cart; Plattner was over there; under his arm lay a sack of leaflets.

"Did you say something to me?" Plattner asked.

"No."

A silence followed. Presently the bookseller spoke again. "Laufen can't be very far now." Then, abandoning his attempt to overcome Jacques's stubborn silence, he too fell silent.

Stretched on the floor of the cart, Kappel was sleeping like a child. Every now and then Plattner sat up and peered through a slit in the tarpaulin, trying to take his bearings. After some minutes had gone by he whispered: "Laufen!"

It was two a.m. The cart moved through the deserted streets at walking pace. Twenty more minutes passed, then suddenly the mare stopped with a jerk.

Kappel gave a low cry of alarm. "What's wrong? Why have we stopped?"

"Sh!"

They were just outside the village of Roschenz and about to leave the valley, turning off into a steep dirt road pitted with dry potholes. Andreyev had alighted. After blowing out the cart-lamps, he took the mare by the bridle and began leading her up the road.

The cart lumbered uphill, shaken by violent jolts that made the springs and the wooden hoops supporting the tarpaulin creak incessantly. Jacques, Plattner, and Kappel had all they could do to keep the load of sacks from slipping to and fro. By a paradox of memory the jolts and noises set a tune running in Jacques's head, a plaintive melody throbbing with wild regret, which at first he did not recognize. Then it came to him. It was the Chopin Etude Jenny played. Pictures rose before him of the garden at Maisons-Lafiitte, of the drawing-room in Mme. de Fontanin's apartment, of that afternoon, so recent yet now so remote, when, at his instance, Jenny had seated herself at the piano.

After half an hour or so, the cart stopped again. Andreyev began unfastening the straps securing the tarpaulin.

"We're there."

Silently the three others scrambled down from the cart.

It was only three o'clock and, though the stars were shining, the night was still quite dark. Only a faint glimmer in the east heralded the daybreak.

Andreyev tethered the horse to the trunk of a small tree. Plattner had fallen silent; the self-confidence he flaunted in his bookshop seemed to have forsaken him. He peered in all directions into the darkness. "Where's that famous plateau of yours? I can't see a thing."

"Come!" said Andreyev.

The four men climbed a steep wooded slope. Andreyev, who was walking in front, halted when they reached the summit. After taking breath, he laid a hand on Plattner's shoulder and, pointing with the other arm into the darkness, said: "The trees stop just over there—you'll see the place when it gets less dark. It's a sort of tableland. The fellow who picked the place knew what he was about, all right."

"And now," Kappel put in, "we'd better begin right away unloading the cart, so that Andreyev can start back before it's light."

"Right you are." Jacques was surprised at the steadiness of his own voice.

All four came down the slope. Steep as was the rise between the hill road and the plateau, it took them only a few minutes to carry all the sacks and gasoline cans to the summit.

"When it's a bit lighter," Jacques remarked, depositing a bundle of white sheets beside him, "we'll spread the sheets at two or three points round the edge of the plateau to help him land."

Plattner turned to the Pole, and said gruffly: "Off you go now, you and your rattle-trap!"

Andreyev remained standing where he was for some moments, gazing at the three men. Then he took a step toward Jacques. It was impossible to make out the expression on his face. Impulsively, in a sudden rush of affection for this man whom he would never see again, an emotion of which Andreyev would never have an inkling, Jacques held out both hands to him, too deeply moved for speech. The Pole took his hands and clasped them; then, bending forward, pressed his lips to Jacques's shoulder… .

They heard the sound of footsteps retreating down the hillside. There was a sudden squeak of the axles as the cart swung round, then a brief silence. Evidently Andreyev was strapping the tarpaulin into place and seeing to the harness before climbing back into his seat. At last the cart got under way and little by little the rumble of wheels, the stridence of creaking springs, and the muffled thud of horse-hoofs on the sandy soil died away into the distance. Standing shoulder to shoulder at the edge of the bluff, Plattner, Kappel, and Jacques peered down into the darkness in the direction of the receding sounds. When silence had closed in again, Kappel was the first to move. Turning toward the plateau, he stretched himself flat on the ground. Plattner squatted down beside him.

Jacques remained standing. There was nothing more to be done for the present, but to wait for dawn, the coming of the plane. And in this interval of forced inactivity, his obsession mastered him again. What would he not have given to be alone for these last moments of his life! He moved a little distance away from the others. Everything's gone well so far, he thought. Now all depends on Meynestrel. Mustn't forget about the sheets, as soon as there's a little light… . The darkness was throbbing with the innumerable small sounds of insects. A cool night breeze fanned his sweat-dewed cheeks and body racked with fever. Though he was dropping with fatigue, he kept pacing restlessly this way and that on the dark plateau, stumbling over hillocks, but always moving within hearing range of Plattner and Kappel, whose whispered conversation came to him across the gloom. At last, worn out by blind groping in the darkness, he felt his legs give way beneath him and let himself sink heavily to earth, closing his eyes… .

Thick as are the prison walls, he has recognized the light footfalls sounding on the flagstones outside. Always he has felt sure Jenny would find some means of entering this place and seeing him once again before the end. He has been waiting, longing for her coming —yet now, preposterously, he resents it. "Leave me in peace! Why don't they shut the doors?" He hammers on the wall to rouse the guard. Too late. He sees her now across the bars. Coming nearer and nearer. Gliding down a long white hospital corridor, a phantom form draped in a black crape veil that she is not allowed to raise in his presence. *They* have forbidden it. He stares at her, giving no sign of welcome. He makes no effort to approach her; he will have no more truck with anyone on earth. There is an iron grating between them, but suddenly, without his knowing how it came about, it has happened: he is fondling a small, tremulous, black-swathed head. Across the gauzy veil he glimpses her pale, drawn face. She whispers: "Are you afraid?" "Yes." His teeth chattering so violently that he can hardly speak, he adds: "Yes, but nobody will know it, nobody but you." In a soft, surprised tone, a lilting voice that is not truly hers, she says: "But—it's the end… oblivion, peace." "Yes, but you can't understand. You don't know what it means." Someone has entered the cell, behind him. He dares not look round. A spasm contracts his shoulders. The world goes black. He is blindfolded. Fists prod his back, urging him forward. A gust of eager air chills the sweat on his brow. Presently he feels grass underfoot. His eyes are still blindfolded, yet he distinctly sees that he is being marched across the Plaimpalais Esplanade under military escort. Little he cares for the escort. He has no thought left for anything or anyone. All that he is aware of is the light dawn wind on his brows, the soft caress of the night that is passing and the rising sun. Tears are streaming down his cheeks. He holds his head high, walking straight forward. His steps are firm but jerky, like those of a clockwork figure when the spring is running down, for he has lost control of his leg-muscles and the ground is pocked with holes that trip him up at every step. No matter. He is moving ahead. The air around him is murmurous with a low drone like the soughing of the wind. Each step brings him nearer the goal. He lifts up his hands in front of him as if they held a votive offering, something infinitely fragile that he must carry without stumbling to the very end. Someone gives a sneering laugh behind his back—is it Meynestrel? …

Slowly his eyes opened. In the blue dome above, the stars were fading. The night was passing and in the east an iridescent sheen, dappled with glints of gold, flooded the horizon, where a jagged mountain range fretted the skyline.

He had not the impression of waking up; his nightmare had passed out of his mind completely. His mind was crystal-clear, limpid as the air after a thunder-shower. The time for action was at hand. Meynestrel was on his way. Once more the phrase from Chopin's Etude echoed in his head, a melody of aching sweetness like a subdued accompaniment to the rapid sequence of his thoughts. … A letter to her. Why not? I can give it to Plattner to transmit. He took his notebook from his pocket, tore out a page, and, without seeing what he wrote, dashed down:

> Jenny, the one love of my life. My last thought is for you. I might have given you years of deep affection. Instead of that I have hurt you, wronged you, always. Yet I would like you to keep a memory of me as …

A muffled thud, followed quickly by another, jarred the ground beneath him. He stopped writing, puzzled. A series of explosions in the distance was echoing in his ears, making itself felt in the shocks transmitted to his body through the ground. Suddenly he understood. The guns! Thrusting his notebook into his pocket, he sprang to his feet. Plattner and Kappel were already standing on the brow of the slope. Jacques ran up to them.

"The guns! The guns in Alsace!"

They stood side by side gazing fixedly, craning their necks in the direction of the sound. Yes, that was the war; it had been waiting over there for the first ray of dawn, to break loose again. In Basel they had caught no sound of it as yet.

And suddenly, as they were holding their breath to listen, there came a different sound from far away, in the opposite direction, a sound that swung all three round toward it. Their eyes met, questioning; none dared as yet put a name to the faint drone that was growing louder every second. The guns still were thudding in the distance, at regular intervals—but they paid no heed. All three men were eye-raking the grey southern horizon, buzzing now as with a swarm of hornets, though nothing was visible as yet.

Suddenly, at the same moment, all their arms went up, pointing; a black speck had risen above the Hoggerwald. Meynestrel!

"The landing-marks!" Jacques cried. Each picked up a sheet and started off at a run to a different corner. Jacques had the farthest way to go. Hugging to his breast the folded sheet, he raced across the plateau, stumbling over hummocks, picking himself up again. His one idea was to reach the far edge of the landing-field in time. He dared not waste a moment looking up to watch the plane's descent; he only heard the drone swell to a deafening roar as it circled overhead, then swooped down like a huge bird of prey striking to snatch him skyward.

# Chapter XXX

AN ICY wind lashed his face, filling his throat and nostrils, making him feel as if he were drowning—but he had no impression of moving forward. All he felt was a succession of violent lurches, as if he stood in the "concertina" vestibule between the coaches in an express train, and a terrific drumming in his ears across the flaps of his helmet. When, after a series of bumps on the rough ground, the plane had risen clear, he had not even noticed it. All about him seethed a dense, fleecy mist reeking with gasolene-fumes. His eyes were open, but his vision, like his mind, seemed bogged in a morass of viscous whiteness. After a while he got back his breath; it needed longer to adjust his nerves to the ear-racking din that hammered on his brain and numbed it, making him feel as if electric currents were tingling through his body to his feet and fingertips. Little by little, however, his mind began to work again, to fill with thoughts and pictures. This time, anyhow, it was no dream. He was strapped to his seat, his legs wedged between the heaps of leaflets stacked around him. He straightened his shoulders. Across the boiling cloud of vapour, under the grey sweep of the wings, he glimpsed immediately in front of him a helmeted head and shoulders, black on white like shadows on a silver screen. And the sight of the Pilot filled his heart with a wild jubilation. At last the great adventure had begun. A psean of triumph, a hoarse, almost animal cry, broke from his lips and mingled with the roar of the gale. Had the Pilot heard? His back remained steady as a rock.

Slewing himself round, Jacques leaned out. The wind rasped his face, screeching past his ears like an adze on a whetstone. As far as eye could reach, an immense chequerwork of grey on green lay spread below, like a colossal fresco laid flat and viewed from a great height, a fresco fissured, flaking, weather-stained, and blotched with patches of dull colour. Or, rather than a fresco, a topographical map, the all but featureless map of an unknown land with vast uncharted spaces. And suddenly it came to him as an amazing thing that there below him at this very moment Plattner and Kappel still went their earth-bound ways, living the creeping life of wingless insects. An access of dizziness dimmed his sight. Drawing back his head, he closed his smarting eyes. And in a flash he saw himself a child again; saw his father and Antoine and Gise and Daniel. And, as in a misted mirror, Jenny in a white tennis costume walking under the trees at Maisons-Laffitte. The vision faded. He opened his eyes again. There was Meynestrel in front of him, his back hunched, the cone of his helmet black against the mist. No, it was no hallucination. At last his dream had come true. How it had been done escaped his memory. From the moment he had started spreading the sheet at a corner of the landing-field, the moment when he had ducked instinctively as the winged monster swooped down on him, up to the wonderful moment he was living through now, there was an almost complete gap in his recollection. Only a few dim pictures had stamped themselves on his mind, dreamlike scenes of vague figures moving in a spectral dusk. He tried to piece the memories together, and suddenly he saw again the form of Meynestrel surging up gaunt and helmeted in the cockpit like a modern Lucifer and investing simultaneously with speech and meaning this loud incursion from the skies. "Quick! The leaflets!" Again he saw men running to and fro on the dark hilltop, sacks being tossed from hand to hand. And he remembered how when, carrying a gasolene-can, he had scrambled up the side of the machine, he had found the Pilot kneeling, flashlight in hand, tightening a nut with a long wrench, and the Pilot had looked round and said: "Bad contact. Where's that mechanic?" "He's gone back with the cart." Without a word Meynestrel had bent forward again and resumed his task in the bowels of the machine. But Jacques could remember nothing of getting into the seat where he now was, or of being strapped in, or putting on the helmet he was wearing.

He wondered for a moment if the plane were really moving. It gave the impression of being stationary, poised in a dome of lambent light that echoed with the never-ceasing roar of the engine.

Jacques turned round. The sun was immediately behind him, just above the horizon. That meant they were travelling north-west. Toward Altkirch and Thann, obviously. Again he shored himself up and gazed down over the side. Wonder of wonders, the mist had grown translucent; the ordnance map over which he had strained his eyes day after day lay spread beneath him—sunlit, colourful, sparkling with life.

Thrilled by the sight, Jacques rested his chin on the metal flange and took possession of this unknown world. A wide band of milk-white radiance cut the landscape in two, seeming to mark the course the plane was taking. That must be the valley of the ill. In the midst of this milky way coiled a long, lethargic reptile, mottled here and there with silvery patches of mist; that was the river. And what was that pale streak ribboning it on the right? A road perhaps, the road to Altkirch. And, no doubt, that filigree of slender lines like a network of veins and arteries was made up of other roads, white on the misted greenness of the plain. And what was that black line which at first he had not noticed, like a penstroke ruled with geometrical precision across the landscape? The railway, presumably. His whole being was focused in that downward gaze. Now he could distinguish clearly every fold and bastion of the hills that flanked the valley. Here and there wisps of lazy vapour were unfurling on the breeze, dwindling away, discovering vast new spaces. That green boss yonder was a densely wooded hilltop. And what was that coming into view, there on his left, through a rift in the fleecy shroud? A town it must be, estraded on the hillside, rosered in the morning light, teeming with unseen life.

The nose of the plane had lifted. Jacques grew aware that they were climbing, in a sure, steady ascent that made his heart beat faster. By now he had grown so used to the roar of the engine that he could not do without it and let it seep into him, thrilling him with a curious ecstasy. It had become the musical counterpart of his exaltation, like a prodigious symphony interpreting in terms of sound the wonder of this magic hour, this soaring rush toward the climax of his days. Inner conflicts and the clash of warring aims were over; he was dispensed from willing, a free man at last. The rushing wind of speed, the heady air of the great height, a blind assurance of success, set the blood wildly pulsing in his veins. Deep down within him he felt his heart thudding in a rapid, even rhythm, like a human accompaniment, a vital response of his being to the triumphal anthem roaring up the sky.

Just then he noticed Meynestrel lean forward. He had done so once before—to study the map presumably. Or perhaps to get a better grip on the controls. Jacques watched the Pilot's movements with shining eyes. "What's up?" he cried light-heartedly, but the distance between them and the din made conversation impossible.

Meynestrel straightened up, then stooped again and remained some minutes in that position. Jacques watched his movements with interest. He could not see what the Pilot was up to, but the heaving of his shoulders gave the impression that he was tugging at some unseen object, perhaps using the long wrench which he had seen in Meynestrel's hands just before they took off.

Anyhow, there was nothing to worry about; the Pilot knew his job… .

Suddenly there was a sort of concussion in the air, a violent jar. What could it be? Jacques looked round wonderingly in all directions; it took him some moments to grasp what had happened. The jolt, the abrupt break of continuity, was merely the shattering impact of silence, a silence dead and elemental like the stillness of the interplanetary spaces, that had replaced the roaring of the engine. But … why stop the engine now?

Meynestrel was standing up, it seemed, for his back masked everything in front. Jacques kept his eyes fixed on the unmoving back. Annoying, not to be able to talk to each other!

As if startled by the silence that had come on it, the plane quivered for a moment in suspense, then suddenly began a swift, slanting dive in a straight line, with the silken swish of an arrow in flight. Why had Meynestrel cut off the engine? Jacques wondered. Was he afraid they might be spotted by its sound or did he propose to land? Perhaps they were nearing the front lines and it would soon be time to start broadcasting the leaflets. Yes, that must be it. For quickly, without turning, Meynestrel waved his left arm. Trembling with excitement, Jacques reached out toward a bundle of leaflets. But as he did so, he lost his balance; the machine had given a lurch that made the leather straps bite into his waist. What could be happening? The machine was reeling forward in a nosedive. Was it intentional? A doubt crept into Jacques's mind, a first premonition of possible disaster. The blind confidence that Meynestrel inspired in him was faltering. Gripping the edge of the cockpit, he braced himself up, looked out. Horror of horrors! The whole countryside was reeling, toppling over. Fields, woods, meadows that a moment before had lain flat as a carpet were crumpling, curling up in all directions like a colour-print going up in flames. A stormwind roared about his ears as the world below leaped up toward him at dizzying, catastrophic speed. With a violent lunge he managed to snap the belt tethering him to his seat, flung himself backward.

The crash. All lost… .

No, by some miracle the plane had righted itself, come back almost to the level. Meynestrel still had control, there was still hope.

For a minute the machine drifted on, fluttering like a leaf on the breeze. Then a series of violent eddies caught it, tossed it this way and that, straining every joint. The fuselage creaked heavily, the wings canted over. Was Meynestrel banking, looking for a place to land? Crouching, Jacques gripped the side of the plane with both hands, clawing at the metal rim, on which his nails could get no purchase. One last clear picture stamped itself on his retina: a clump of pine trees, a sunlit meadow. Then instinctively he closed his eyes. His mind went blank. A grip of steel closed on his heart. Time stopped and stood still. Heralded by a blare of horns that split his eardrums, gigantic Catherine-wheels lit up all around him, volleying clots of flame, enveloping him in whirling light. He shouted. "Meynest …!" A shattering blow landed on his jaw. His body was thrown forward, flung, flattened out like a trowelful of mortar tossed at a wall.

Intense heat. Flames, a reek of pungent smoke, flurries of sparks. Daggers jabbing at his limbs, knives slashing his flesh. Gasping for breath, he writhed and struggled, made superhuman efforts to force a way out of the welter of flames. Impossible. His feet were welded to the bedplate of the furnace.

Two claws of steel gripped his shoulders from behind, dragged him backward. Every joint cracking, wrenched asunder, he screamed with agony. Men were hauling him over a rack of iron spikes, his body was being torn to shreds.

Suddenly the agony subsided in a great calm. A flood of darkness. Oblivion.

# Chapter XXXI

VOICES. Far-away sounds muffled by heavy curtains. Yet the words forced their way imperiously into his consciousness. Someone was talking to him. Meynestrel? Yes, that must be Meynestrel's voice. He struggled, made desperate efforts to rouse himself from the deep coma numbing his mind.

"Who are you? French? Swiss?"

Twinges of excruciating pain shot through his back, knees, thighs. He was pinioned, nailed to the ground. His mouth was a mass of raw wounds, his tongue so swollen he could hardly breathe. Keeping his eyes shut, he slowly swayed his head this side and that, bracing his shoulders in an attempt to rise. Impossible. With a stifled groan he fell back again onto the spikes lacerating his back. His throat and nostrils were filled with gasolene-fumes and the reek of charred cloth. His mouth began to dribble; with a great effort he parted his lips and spat out a small, round, pulpy blood-clot.

"Speak up, man! What's your nationality? Were you on reconnaissance?"

The voice buzzed in his ears, fretting his torpor. For a moment his eyelids opened, his wandering gaze rose from depths of darkness. Overhead he saw a patch of sky, a treetop. Then a glimpse of dusty leggings, red trousers, a group of French soldiers bending over him… . They had killed him and were watching him die.

The leaflets? The plane?

Raising his head an inch or so, he peered between the leggings. There was the plane. Some thirty yards away a tangled mass of wreckage lay smouldering in the sunlight' like a dying pyre; a heap of scrap-iron hung with streamers of burnt canvas. Farther away, deeply embedded in the ground, a wing stood upended, gaunt and tattered as a scarecrow. The leaflets! Not one would reach its goal. All were dead and buried in that mound of ashes. An immense pity for their fate came over him and, letting his head sink back, he gazed up dully at the sunlit sky. But then his pain surged up again like vitriol eating through his flesh down to the marrow of his bones. Nothing, nothing mattered except that pain. Ah, let death come to him—quickly, quickly!

"Now, then! Out with it! Are you a Frenchman? What the hell were you up to in that machine?"

The voice dinned panting in his ears; insistent, but devoid of harshness.

Opening his eyes, Jacques saw bending above him a young-looking face, puffy with fatigue; two bespectacled blue eyes under a képi with a blue band. There was a confused murmur of voices round him; he caught a phrase or two. "He ain't got back his senses yet, I tell you." "Have you let the captain know?" "Won't you go through his pockets, sir? He may have some papers on him." "Well, he had a close call, and no mistake!" "The doctor's coming. Pasquin's gone to get him."

The man with the glasses had gone down on one knee. His jacket was unbuttoned at the throat, his chin covered with stubble, his chest crisscrossed with leather and canvas straps.

"Don't you understand French? *Bist du Deutsch? Verstehst du?*"

A hand grasped his lacerated shoulder roughly. He gave a low moan. The lieutenant promptly withdrew his hand.

"Are you in pain? Like a drink of water?"

Jacques's eyes fluttered in assent.

"Anyhow, he understood that," the officer remarked, rising to his feet.

"I'll bet he's a spy, sir."

Jacques tried to turn his head in the direction of the man with the high-pitched voice who had just spoken. But just then some of the men beside him moved away, exposing to view a black object lying on the ground three yards away—a burnt, unrecognizable thing with nothing human about it except the arm doubled up on the grass. The charred fingers were shaped like a bird's talons—slim, sinewy fingers half

clenched on air. Jacques could not take his eyes of? them. Around him the sound of voices seemed growing fainter.

"Look, sir! There's Pasquin coming back with the doctor. Pasquin saw it all—he was on his way to the picket-post with the morning rations when they crashed. He says that the plane …"

The voice died out into the distance, muffled by heavy curtains falling from the skies. Overhead, the treetop had gone blurred. And very slowly the pain, too, died down, dwindling to a nauseating languor. The leaflets, Meynestrel! Ah, to be dead like him …!

For what inexplicable, compelling reason should he be lying thus bound and helpless in a little boat, tossed on the waves? Meynestrel had been wiser, he had flung himself overboard an hour ago, when the storm on the lake had made the motion of their little craft past all enduring. Like molten lead the sunbeams seared his cheeks; there was no shelter anywhere from their remorseless impact. In a vain effort to turn over, he half opened his eyes, but closed them again promptly; arrows of gold had transfixed his pupils. The sharp-edged pebbles on the bottom of the boat were tearing his back to shreds. He tried to call to Meynestrel, but a red-hot cinder in his mouth was burning through his tongue. There came a sudden shock, jarring every nerve, sending ripples of bright pain across his body. A wave had caught the boat and bumped it against the pier. He opened his eyes. "Hey, Chinaware, want a drink?" The speaker was a gendarme with an ill-shaven face like a country cure's. All round was a babble of gruff, uncouth voices. He was suffering. Wounded. He must have had an accident. Yes, a drink. The rim of a tin mug touched his burning lips. "Yes, mate, their rifles is a washout. But their machine-guns, them's the goods. And they got 'em all over the place, damn their eyes!" "I guess we got machine-guns, too, stowed away somewhere. One of these days they'll trot 'em out, just you wait and-see."

Water! Though he lay in the full glare of the August sun his teeth chattered against the metal rim. His mouth was a mass of ulcerating wounds. He gulped a draught of water that stuck in his throat; a thin stream trickled down his chin. He tried to raise his arm. In vain; his wrists were shackled, and tied to the sides of the stretcher. He wanted to drink again, but the hand holding the mug had moved away. Suddenly it all came back to him. The plane, the roaring flames, Meynestrel's charred fingers, the holocaust of the leaflets. His eyes were smarting with the glare, with tears and dust and sweat. He closed them again. More water. No. Pain, all-compelling pain. Nothing mattered now except his pain. … A tumult of voices round him made him open his eyes.

He was in the midst of a crowd of men in bedraggled uniforms, their shirts gaping, their hair matted with sweat, bawling at each other, bustling to and fro. He lay on a stretcher set down on the grass beside a road swarming with troops. A long train of mule-carts was creaking past, raising clouds of dust. On the side-path some gendarmes were passing round a soldier's water-bottle that glinted in the light as they tilted it above their mouths and drank without letting the rim touch their lips. Pyramids of piled arms and dumps of haversacks lined the road as far as eye could reach. Groups of men sprawling on the grassy banks were smoking, arguing, gesticulating. The most exhausted were lying on their backs, their arms folded over their eyes, sound asleep in the full blaze of the sun. Ah, if only he could drink! Every part of him was throbbing with pain: his mouth, his back, his legs. Now and again a feverish shiver ran down his spine, drawing from him a low moan. But the lancinating twinges he had felt shooting through his body just after the crash had ceased. Presumably he had been given medical attention, his wounds had been dressed. A wild idea flashed through the twilight of his mind: his legs had been amputated… . What could that matter now? But the idea would not leave him. Could he feel his legs? No, there was no sensation left in that part of his body. Somehow he must find out. Strapped down as he was to the stretcher, he could do no more than raise his head a little, enough to have a glimpse of his bloodstained hands and his legs protruding from the trousers that had been cut off just below his thighs. Evidently his legs had not been amputated. They were swathed in bandages and, from the knees down, set in splints. The splints consisted of strips of wood that had obviously been taken from some packing-case, for one of them still bore a black stencilled inscription:

"CHINAWARE. WITH CARE." Exhausted, he let his head sink back onto the stretcher.

Voices all around him. A rumour of voices; soldiers' talk. "A fellow in the Hussars told us the regiment was falling in behind those trees." "The hell he did! I say, let's keep with the column. At the first halt they'll tell us where to go." "Where did you boys come from?" "How d'you expect us to know the names? We came from over there. What about you?" "Same here. And I can tell you we've been having a godawful time ever since last Friday." "We been through it, too." "Don't know about you fellows, but as for us it's simple: since the push started—that's three days ago, ain't it, Friday, the seventh?—we haven't had six hours' sleep all told. Ain't that so, Maillard? And no grub, neither. On Saturday they issued a spot o' rations, but since the Jerries got us on the hop, not a damn thing to eat. Supplies broken down, they say. Lucky for us we managed to swipe a bit in the villages." Other voices, farther off, hoarse with anger. "And I tell you, we're not through with it yet, not by a long shot!" "Aye, they've got us by the short hairs, good and proper. Ain't that so, Chabaux? And if we try another push, we'll get it in the neck again."

Most painful of all, perhaps, were the wounds in his mouth, which prevented him from swallowing his saliva, from speaking or drinking, almost from breathing. Gingerly he tried to move his tongue. From deep down in his throat welled up a nauseating taste of gasolene and burnt varnish.

"And then, you know, all those nights out on patrol, they get a man down. When the battalion advanced on Carspach …"

Yes, it must be his tongue that was injured; it was swollen, raw, in shreds. A fragment of wreckage must have hit him in the face, or else he had been thrown forward onto his chin. Still, the pain was *inside* his mouth. He applied his mind to the problem. "I must have bitten my tongue," he concluded at last. The strain of concentrating had exhausted him; a lit of dizziness made him close his eyes. At once flames leaped up before them, and the twinges in his legs set in again. With a faint moan he relapsed into a coma, a respite without thought.

"Burnt all over … legs fair torn to pieces … a spy."

He opened his eyes. The gendarmes had come up to have a look at the stretcher and a group had gathered.

"Their plane crashed?" "Yes, a Taube. Bricard saw it." "Bricat?" "No, Bricard, that tall N.C.O. in Company 5." "Burnt out it was, their plane." "Well, that's one lousy Taube out of the way, anyhow." "That fellow, 'Chinaware' we call him, was in luck. His legs are in a nasty mess, but the doc says he'll pull through." Jacques had heard the voice before; looking around, he saw the elderly gendarme with the pale eyes, bald head, and air of a country parson, who had given him a drink. "The hell he will!" The speaker was another gendarme, a swarthy, thickset little man with darkly glowing eyes, who looked like a Corsican. "Hear that, sir? Marjoulat says Chinaware's out of danger. Not for long, though." The police sergeant grinned. "Yes, Paoli, you're right there. Not for long. The firing-squad'll see to that." He was a big burly man with a jet-black beard and cheeks the colour of raw meat. The stripes on his sleeve were brand-new. "Then why the devil didn't they shoot him out of hand, the scum?" a soldier asked. The sergeant made no reply. "Got to take him far like that?" "We've been told to hand the bastard over at brigade headquarters," the Corsican explained. The sergeant scowled and looked away, then grunted in an officious tone: "We're waiting for orders." A regimental sergeant let out a high-pitched cackle. "Waiting for orders, are you? What about us? We've been waiting for orders for the last two days, we have." "Waiting for our rations, too." "What a bloody mess!" "There's no battalion runners left, they say. The colonel can't get orders through nohow." A peremptory whistle cut the conversations short. "Unpile arms! We're moving on." "Put on packs! Jump to it, there! Fall in!"

There was a general commotion as the men ran to their places and the column got under way again. Jacques felt himself sinking into an abyss of darkness. Water was lapping round the boat. A great wave lifted it, rocked it for a moment, then swept it forward.

"On the right, close up!" "What's up now?" "Close up there! Don't straggle!" The jolts made him open his eyes. A broad back loomed before them: the gendarme holding the front handles of the stretcher.

A ripple went down the column as it opened out to pass round a dead mule lying in the middle of the road, its belly hideously distended, legs in air. The men spat, sickened by the stench, and flapped their hands against the swarm of flies that rose from the carcass, buzzing round their faces. Then the ranks fell back into line; as they picked up the step again, the clank of hobnailed boots on the hard road resumed its ponderous rhythm.

What time was it? Sunbeams fell vertically, scorching his cheeks. His body ached with pain. Probably ten or eleven. Where were they taking him? It was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. A train of regimental wagons was lumbering past at walking pace, raising a dense cloud of dust fetid with the mingled stench of horse-dung, hot leather, sodden wool, and sweating bodies. All his strength had been drained out of him by pain; he was too weak to think, to shake off the torpor of his mind. The acrid dust stung his throat; his gums were parched with thirst and fever. He was a helpless atom, lost in this mass of marching men; forlorn, alone, bereft of all, of life and death alike. During his rare spells of lucidity, between the periods of unconsciousness and nightmare hallucinations, he repeated to himself incessantly the one word "Courage!" Now and again the files closed in so densely round the stretcher that his whole range of vision was filled with heaving shoulders and rifle-barrels glinting in the turbid air, and he pictured himself in the midst

of a great forest moving tumultuously forward. Mechanically his eyes fixed themselves on a big knapsack swaying like a pendulum on a man's back, then on a bright tin mug that hung from a canteen enclosed in a blue cotton cover. A good many men had loosened the straps and let their packs down almost to their waists. Their shoulders were bowed, their faces grimed with sweat-sodden dust. Sometimes Jacques caught one of them eyeing him with a curious unfocused stare, at once attentive and unmindful, disconcerting in its strange remoteness.

On and on they trudged, straight forward, shoulder to shoulder, seeing nothing, saying nothing, staggering now and then but never halting in the retreat to safety; wearing down their strength on the straight, stony road as on a grindstone. To Jacques's right was a tall, gaunt soldier with a cameolike profile; he wore a Red Cross armband and walked with gravely measured strides, his head uplifted and on his face the rapt expression of a man in prayer. On the left of the stretcher was an undersized little man who picked his way, limping a little. Jacques's gaze settled dully on the limb that always paused an instant before coming forward and sagged at the knees with every step. Sometimes, when an eddy in the ranks made an opening beside him, Jacques had a glimpse of trees and hedges, a radiant countryside. He had a dreamlike impression of having seen a little way back a grey farmhouse with shuttered windows, a mud-walled barn, a farmyard with a dunghill and chickens pecking at it; the warm, pungent odour of the manure had been wafted to his nostrils. Had it really existed, or was it a figment of his fuddled brain? As the stretcher swayed from side to side, twinges shot through his legs and the pain in his mouth blazed up again. If only that gendarme would think of giving him some more water! At every moment progress was held up by sudden halts, after which the stretcher-bearers had to double, panting, and catch up with the ranks in front when a new start was made, before the cart-drivers took advantage of the gap to force their way into the column. "It's an awful muddle and no mistake! I'd like to know why everybody's using the same road." "The same road—not a bit of it, mate! Why, all the roads round here is cluttered up the same as this, most likely. When a whole division's retreating, what else can you expect?" "A division? It's the whole Seventh Army Corps, so I was told."

"Hey, you there, what the hell are you up to?" "Gone dippy, have you?" "Stop it, you fool!" A man in territorial uniform had cut across the road, against the advancing stream, and was heading eastward, toward the enemy. Paying no heed to the others' shouts, he threaded his way between the transport wagons. He was no longer young; his beard was grey, and not with dust alone. He carried no rifle or pack, and wore a military greatcoat over peasant's corduroys. A bunch of miscellaneous equipment flapped at his waist: cartridge-boxes, canteen, several haversacks. "Hi, Daddy, where d'you think you're off to?" He dodged the arms thrust forth to stop him. His face was haggard, his eyes were wild and resolute, and his lips fluttered as though he were conversing with a ghost in whispers. "Going home, old boy?" "Good luck!" "Send us a picture-postcard when you get there!" Without looking round, without a word, the man strode ahead, climbed over a heap of stones, crossed the ditch, forced his way through the hedge into the fields beyond, and vanished.

"Say! Look at that! Boats!" "On the road?" "What the hell …?" "It's the pontoon party retiring." "They've cut across the column." "Where?" "Yes, look! Boats on wheels! Did you ever see the like?" "Looks to me, sonny, as if we'd given up the idea of crossing the Rhine." "Close up there! Carry on!" The column got under way again.

Five hundred yards on, another halt. "What's up now?" This time the halt persisted. The road was spanned by a grade crossing, and a train composed of empty cars was crawling by, drawn by a panting, groaning little locomotive. The gendarmes set down the stretcher in the dust. "Looks like things are going badly for us," Marjoulat remarked with a whinnying laugh, "if they're moving back the rolling stock." The sergeant glowered at the train, mopping his face, and made no reply.

"Hoho!" chuckled the little Corsican. "Old Marjoulat's bucked up no end, ain't he, since we started falling back!" "Marjoulat," remarked a third gendarme, a bull-necked, strongly built man who had seated himself on a stone-heap and was munching a slice of bread, "Marjoulat went a bit green in the gills, I noticed, when we were under fire the day before yesterday." Marjoulat turned crimson. He had large grey eyes, a prominent nose, and beetling brows, and habitually wore an expression of sullen obstinacy tempered by a furtive slyness; it was the typical face of a shrewd, calculating peasant. He turned toward the police sergeant, whose eyes were fixed on him.

"I ain't ashamed to say it, Sarge. War don't suit me nohow; I ain't no Corsican and I've never been one for fighting."

But the sergeant was not listening; his attention was directed to the grade crossing. Across the rumble of the train there sounded a drumming of horse-hoofs. A group of mounted men came trotting up beside the railway-line. "It's a patrol." "No, it's the Staff." "Bringing orders, most likely." "Stand back there, damn you!" The troop consisted of a cavalry captain, two N.C.O.'s and some lancers. The horses picked their way between the wagons and the troops, swung round the stretcher, formed up on the far side of the road, and galloped across country, westward. "Them fellows have all the luck." "Don't you believe it! They say the cavalry division's been told off to cover our retreat. Those poor devils are going to get it in the neck, keeping the Germans off our rear."

Round the stretcher some men were engaged in conversation. Their jackets were open at the throat and on each sweating chest there dangled from a black cord the man's identification tag, a metal disk. There was no way of distinguishing their ages; all alike had dust-stained, wizened faces; all looked old men. "Any water left?" "Not a drop." "Zeps? Yes, we saw one on the nigft of the seventh flying low over the woods." "What's that you say? We ain't retreating? Tell us another!" "It's the gospel truth. One of the brigade runners heard a Staff officer explaining it to the Old Man. We're not retreating, he said." "No. It's what they call a strategic withdrawal. To get all set for a counter-offensive. It's a mighty fine idea. We'll nip them in a pair of pincers." "In a what?" "A pair of pincers, he said. Ask the C.S.M. about it, he knows. It means letting 'em advance till they're up to the neck in it, then you close the pincer;—zip!—and you've got 'em cold. See the idea?" "Look! There's a Taube." "Where?" "Over there. Just above that hayrick." "Forward!" "That's a Taube, Sergeant." "Forward! There's the guard's van passing, the crossing's clear." "How do you know it's a Taube?" "Can't you see? We're popping off at it." Round the tiny speck of brightness in the zenith, puffs of smoke were leaping into view; they hovered for a moment like suspended snowballs before dissolving on the breeze. "Fall in there! By the right! Forward!" The tail of the train was disappearing round a bend.

A general commotion. The sudden jolts sent waves of agony through Jacques. Courage! In a last moment of lucidity he listened to the heavy breathing of the stretcher-bearer behind his head. Then all went blurred; a fit of giddiness came over him. Courage! Like the red-and-blue horses of a merry-go-round the marching files flickered in dizzy circles through the dust and glare. He groaned. Delicate, sinewy fingers, Meynestrel's, blackened, shrivelled up, shrunk to a bird's charred claws. The leaflets! All burnt! All hope lost. Ah, to die, to die!

The blare of a motor-horn. He opened his eyes. The column had halted just outside a little town. A car was coming up from behind, hooting loudly. The men retreated to the sides of the road to make way for it. The sergeant sprang to attention and saluted. It was an open car flying a flag and packed with officers. At the back glinted the gold lace of a general's képi. Jacques closed his eyes, and again the scene of the court-martial rose before him. He was standing in the centre of the courtroom confronting that general with the braided cap—M. Faîsme. The car was hooting continuously. The mist closed in again. When he opened his eyes once more he saw a neatly clipped hedge, a lawn, clumps of geraniums, a villa with striped Venetian blinds. Maisons-Laffitte. A white flag with a red cross floated above the gateway. Drawn up in front of the steps was an ambulance-car riddled with bullets, all its windows shattered. The column marched past it, then halted once more. The stretcher was dumped roughly down on the roadside. Now at every stop the men, instead of keeping their ranks, flung themselves down on the ground, without discarding haversacks or rifles, and lay supine, as if incapable of ever rising again.

The town was some two hundred yards away. "Looks as if we were going to halt there," the sergeant remarked.

Another move forward. "Fall in there!" After advancing fifty yards the column halted again.

A jerk. What was happening now? The sun was still high and blazing hot. How many hours, how many days had it lasted, this never-ending march? Jacques was in pain. The blood oozing into his throat gave his saliva an acrid taste. The horse-flies swarming round the mules kept settling on his lips and hands.

A lad from the town started talking to a group of soldiers who had gathered round him; his eyes were sparkling. "They've been locked up in the Mayor's cellar," he said, grinning. "Three German prisoners. Sick as hell they look! You can see 'em behind the grating. They've faces just like weasels. The people here say they grab all the kids they can and chop their hands off. One of 'em was led out to piss. We tried to tear his guts out, we did, only the sentry wouldn't let us." The police sergeant called to the youngster: "Any wine left in your place?" "Sure! Lots of it." "Here's a franc. Go and get a bottle."

"You won't never see that kid again," Marjoulat predicted sagely. "Fall in! Forward!" Another fifty yards' advance brought them to a crossroad where a cavalry troop had just dismounted. To the right, on a big railed-off common, a fair-ground by the look of it, some N.C.O.'s had mustered what remained of an infantry company. In the centre a captain was haranguing his men. Then the ranks fell out. Beside a haystack a field-kitchen was dispensing soup. The air was loud with shouts, the clink of tin canteens, and a buzz of voices like a hornets' nest. The lad came back again, waving a bottle. "Here's your wine," he said with a grin. "Seventy centimes they took for it, the robbers!"

Jacques opened his eyes again. The bottle was misted as if it had been on ice. He gazed at it eagerly; the mere sight of the bottle had filled him with a frantic thirst. The gendarmes had gathered round their sergeant, who was fondling the bottle as if to relish its cool contact before beginning to drink. He took his time. Then, planting his feet well apart, he took a steady purchase on his legs and, before setting the bottle to his lips, cleared his throat and spat. After drinking he beamed on the company, then passed the bottle to Marjoulat, next in seniority. Would Marjoulat think of Jacques? No, he drank and handed the bottle to Paoli, whose nostrils were quivering like a thirsty animal's. Jacques slowly dropped his eyelids so as to see no more… .

Voices round him. He shot a glance at the newcomers. Some N.C.O.'s from the troop halted at the crossroad had come over to have a chat with the infantrymen. "We're the Light Brigade. We went into action with the Seventh Army Corps on the seventh. Our job was to smash through to Thann, then wheel round along the Rhine bank and cut the bridges. But we were in too much of a hurry. It didn't pan out the way they'd reckoned on. The poor infantry were walked off their feet; even our horses were done in. So we had to fall back." "The usual lousy muddle!" "Muddle! It's nothing here to what it is up north where we came from. I never saw such a sight. The roads are jammed; there's not only the troops but the villagers who're scared and scuttling for all they're worth." "We," an infantry sergeant put in, in a deep, resonant voice, "we were the advance guard. We reached Altkirch just as it was getting dark." "On the eighth?"

"Yes, Saturday, the day before yesterday." "We were there, too. The infantry put up a fine show, there's no denying it. Altkirch was thick with squareheads. Well, in less than no time we'd mopped 'em all up with fixed bayonets. And what's more, we kept 'em on the run right up to Walheim." "Our bunch got as far as Tagolsheim." "And next day the road was clear in front of us. Not a Boche between us and Mulhausen. We were beginning to think there'd be no stopping us all the way to Berlin. But the dirty dogs, they knew very well what they were up to, letting us go ahead like that. Ever since yesterday they've been counter-attacking. Seems we're having a rough house over there." "Anyhow, it's a bit of luck, our being ordered to retire. Else we'd all have been blown to bits by now." An infantry C.S.M. and some sergeants had joined the group. The sergeant-major, a red-cheeked man with bloodshot eyes, began speaking in a jerky voice. "We were in action for thirteen hours on end. Isn't that so, Rocher? Thirteen solid hours! The Germans were in a pinewood in front of us. God! I won't forget that pinewood in a hurry. There was no way of driving them out of it. So our company was ordered to work round the wood and turn their flank. We wriggled along on our bellies for the best part of a mile; it took us two or three hours to cover the distance to the farmhouse we were to occupy. Me, I'm a cashier in civil life and I'm out of training for that sort of stunt. Still, we got to the farm all right. The family were all down in the cellar—the women and kids, poor things, howling with fright. We locked the cellar door on them; you never know with Alsatians. We bored loopholes in the walls. Then we went up to the second floor and bunged up the windows with mattresses. We'd only one machine-gun, but plenty of ammunition. Well, we held that farm for a whole day. 'Sacrificed'—that's what the colonel said we'd been. All the same, we managed to get back, some of us. It's unbelievable what you manage to do once you're up against it. Still, when we got word to retire, we didn't wait to be told twice, I can tell you. There were two hundred of us when we started out of the wood. When we left the farmhouse we were sixty, all told, and of those sixty, twenty men were wounded. And yet, believe it or not, it's not so terrible as it sounds. It's not so terrible be-, cause a man loses track of what he's doing. Everybody gets that way, officers and men alike. You don't see anything. You don't understand a thing. You just take cover and plug away. You don't see your mates falling. There was a fellow hit just beside me; his blood spurted over my face. He screamed: 'They got me!' That was all. I can hear his voice still—but I don't even know who it was. Never stopped to look. You keeps on firing, yelling, firing, yelling, till you goes sort of bafty. Isn't that so, Rocher?" "Aye, but don't forget one thing," said Rocher glaring at the men around him. "Them Fritzes, as compared with our lot, are just a washout." "Look, sir!" a gendarme shouted. "The column's started off again." "What's that? Fall in, then!" The N.C.O.'s scuttled back to their places. "Close in there! Close in! By the right! Forward!" "So long," said the police sergeant as he walked past the cavalrymen, "and good luck to you."

There were no more halts before the column had entered the little town, filling the narrow street with a herdlike rumble of trampling feet. The pace was slower, and Jacques felt less pain now that the lurching of the stretcher had diminished. He looked about him. Houses. Journey's end at last?

The townsfolk were standing at their doorways in groups: elderly men, women with babies in their arms, children clinging to their mothers' skirts. For hours on end, perhaps ever since daybreak, they had been standing thus, craning their necks, half blinded by the dust and glare, watching with anxious eyes the never-ending stream of men and vehicles pouring down the street: transport wagons, ambulance sections, artillery trains, footsore regiments—all the impressive "covering army" they had seen some days before advancing in good order toward the frontier and now was returning in a disorderly retreat, leaving them to the invader's mercy. The choking dust-cloud welling up into the sunlight brought to mind a housebreaker's yard in full activity. Street, paths, and backyards were buzzing like hives of angry bees. The shops were packed with soldiers making a clean sweep of all the drinkables and foodstuffs. The church square was occupied by army wagons and troops. On the right, where there was a little shade, was a cavalry squadron; the men had dismounted and were holding their horses by the bridles. A cavalry major in a blazing temper was vigorously telling off an aged constable attired in a comic-opera uniform. The big church doors stood open; in the half-light of the nave wounded men were aligned on beds of straw, with nurses, orderlies and white-aproned doctors moving to and fro among them. Outside, a company quartermaster-sergeant, standing on a cart, was bawling across the tumult: "Company 5! This way for rations!"

The column was making slower and slower headway. The main street narrowed into a bottle-neck behind the church. Wedged into a solid mass, the company marked time, chafing at the delay. An old man seated at his door in a grandfather's chair, his hands played on his knees, watched the scene with the air of a dramatic critic at an indifferent first night. "Say!" he called to the police sergeant. "How far d'you think you're going on retreating like this?" "Don't know. We're waiting for orders." The old man's limpid gaze lingered for a moment on the stretcher and the gendarmes; then he wagged his head disapprovingly. "I seen the same thing in '70. Only *we* held out longer." But Jacques saw a vague compassion in the old grey eyes, a glint of kindness.

The column was advancing again. It had crossed the middle of the town. "I'm told we're halting over there, opposite the last houses in the street," said the police sergeant, who had just consulted his superior officer. "So much the better," Marjoulat remarked. "We'll be the first to get away." The cobbles ended and the street became a country road, flanked by cottages and gardens. "Halt! Let the wagons pass!" "You men," said the sergeant, "run back and see if the 'cooker' ain't somewhere behind. We could do with a bite. I'll stay here with Paoli, to keep an eye on Chinaware."

The stretcher had been laid on the roadside near a drinking-trough at which men of all arms were filling their water-bottles. The water was splashing over the edge, trickling down the side of the trough in glistening runlets which held Jacques's eyes enthralled. There was a bitter metallic taste in his mouth; his saliva had the feel of sodden cotton-wool. "Like a drink, lad?" Miracle of miracles, the glint of a white bowl in the brown hands of an old peasant woman! A group of people had collected: soldiers, civilians, old men with tanned cheeks, children, womenfolk. The bowl drew near Jacques's lips. He was trembling, his eyes glowing with doglike gratitude. Milk! He drank it painfully, sip by sip. With a corner of her apron the old woman wiped his chin after each sip.

A medical officer came up. "A wounded man?" "Yes, sir. But you needn't waste your time on him; he's a spy—a Boche." The old peasant jumped away as if she had been stung and tipped out the milk remaining in her bowl into the dust. "It's a spy, a German spy." As the news went round, the bystanders closed in on Jacques. They were in an ugly mood. He was alone, defenceless, bound hand and foot. He turned his eyes away. Suddenly a burning sensation on his cheek made him jerk his head back. There were guffaws. He had a glimpse of a young workman in blue overalls bending above him. The youngster gave a jeering laugh; between his fingers was a cigarette, the tip of which glowed brightly. "Let him be," growled the police sergeant. "But it's a spy," the lad protested. "A spy! Come and have a look at the swine!" People flocked up from the cottages beside the road; an angry crowd gathered round. It was all the policemen could do to make them keep their hands off Jacques. "What was he up to?" "Where did you nab him?" "Why didn't you shoot the bastard at sight?" A small boy picked up some pebbles and flung them. Others followed his example. "That's enough of it!" the Sergeant bawled. "Stop that, you young devils!" Then, turning to Paoli: "Just shift him into that yard. And don't forget to lock the gate."

Jacques felt himself lifted from the ground and carried forward. The sound of angry, jeering voices died away into a restful silence. Where was he? He cast a quick glance around. He was in a farmyard, well out of sight, in the shadow of a barn fragrant with warm hay. Beside him was an antiquated wagonette, the two stumps of its broken shafts projecting into the air; some hens were perched on them, asleep. How delightful were the cool shadows, this heavensent solitude! Ah, if only he could die here, in this peace!

He awoke with a start. The gendarmes had burst in like an avalanche. The fowls scattered in all directions, cackling with fright.

What was happening? All around was a wild commotion, shouting, a general stampede. The police sergeant hurriedly put on his jacket and equipment. "Hey, there! Pick up Chinaware! And snap into it!" Along the narrow street on the far side of the farmyard an ambulance unit was trotting past. "Look, Sarge, they're moving out the first-aid station as well." "Yes, yes, I know. Where's Marjoulat got to, damn him! Hurry up, Paoli. What's this now? What do the engineers want here?" Two trucks, followed by a fatigue party, had entered the yard. The men began unloading coils of barbed wire and pickets. "Stow the wire in that corner! The rest of the stuff here. Look sharp!" The police sergeant went up to the N.C.O. in charge of the fatigue party and inquired anxiously: "Bad as all that, is it?" "Seems so. We've been detailed to put this place in a state of defence. I hear they've occupied the Vosges already and are pushing on to Belfort. There's talk of asking for a truce, I hear, so's to spare the country an invasion." "Gosh, you don't say so! Then it's all up with us?" "See here, the best thing you fellows can do is to hook it right away. No use hanging around here. The inhabitants have been told to clear out. The town's got to be evacuated within an hour." The police sergeant swung round on his subordinates. "Well, what about it? Get a move on with that stretcher! Now, Marjoulat, there's no time for dawdling." A roar of engines in the farmyard. The trucks had been unloaded and were turning. The voice of a captain rang out through the din: "Now, men, forage round for all the ploughs and harrows you can lay hands on. Reapers, too. Tell Lieutenant Martin to stop the people here from taking away their carts. We'll need them to barricade the roads." "Marjoulat! What are you waiting for?" shouted the police sergeant. "Right, Sergeant. We're just starting."

Four arms lifted the stretcher. Jacques groaned. The gendarmes swung into the road, along which the troops were moving forward in marching order. The formation was so close that it was no easy matter finding a place within the serried mass. "Shove for all you're

worth!" Marjoulat shouted to Paoli. "We've got to squeeze in somehow, or we'll get left. "*Basta!*" the Corsican exclaimed. "Surely they don't expect us to cart this bird about the country till our legs drop off!"

Jolts. Jolts. In every joint and sinew pain blazed up again.

The little town was in an uproar. In each house and backyard people were shouting, protesting, breaking into lamentations. The farmers were feverishly harnessing their horses to light carts, which the women loaded with trunks, bundles, cradles, baskets of foodstuffs. Many families were escaping on foot. They mingled with the ranks of marching men, some of them wheeling go-carts or baby-carriages piled with their household goods. On the left of the road a line of ammunition wagons drawn by sturdy cart-horses was moving past at a slow trot, making an ear-splitting din. Every side-street was disgorging into the main stream donkey-carts and wains stacked with crates, furniture, and mattresses on which old women and children were perched uneasily. The civilian vehicles wormed their way into the file of regimental wagons that was moving at walking pace along the middle of the road. Forced off the roadway to the right by the wheeled traffic, the troops advanced as best they could along the edge and in the ditch. The sun blazed down relentlessly. With bent shoulders, their caps shoved back and handkerchiefs spread over the napes of their necks to shield them from the glare, laden like beasts of burden—some were even carrying faggots slung across their shoulders—they slogged ahead. No one spoke. They had lost touch with their regiments. They did not know whence they had come, whither they were going. No matter; after a week of war they had given up trying to understand. All they knew was that they were on the run. And the satisfaction of escaping, fear, shame, and exhaustion had stamped all faces with a like expression of tragic fatalism. The only moments when they broke silence were when, jostled by the man beside him, one of them let out a savage oath.

Jacques's eyes opened and shut at the more violent jolts. The pain in his legs had subsided a little during his brief rest in the shadow of the barn, but his inflamed mouth was throbbing violently as ever. The dust, the fetid emanations from the sweating mass around him clogged his lungs, and the wavelike motion of the closely packed bodies gave him a feeling of nausea. He made no effort to think. He was a scrap of human jetsam, rejected by all men—even by himself.

The retreat continued. The road grew narrower, flanked by shelving banks, and there were frequent halts. As at each halt the stretcher was dumped roughly on the ground, Jacques opened his eyes abruptly. "Bastal If we crawl along like this, the Fritzes will have easy work… ." "Aw, shut your trap!" the sergeant cut in—his nerves, too, were getting jangled. "Can't you see we're starting again?" The column floundered on another fifty yards, then stopped abruptly. The gendarmes halted at the junction of a by-road where a company was drawn up in close formation, their rifles slung across their backs. On the top of the bank a group of officers stood round the captain, studying their maps and confabulating. His interest roused by the stretcher, a sergeant-major approached. The police sergeant asked him: "Where's your lot going?" "Dunno. The C.O.'s waiting for orders." "Things going badly, eh?" "Looks like it. The Jerries have been seen just north, I hear." An officer stepped forward to the edge of the embankment and shouted: "Slope arms! To the right, follow my lead." Leaving the crowded road on the left, he led his men into the fields adjoining it. "That fellow knows his job, Sarge. They'll be there hours ahead of us." The police sergeant chewed his moustache and made no answer.

The halt continued. It seemed that some considerable obstacle was holding up the column. Even the artillery trains on the left had stopped moving. A bicycle unit, wheeling their machines, tried to thread their way between the vehicles, but they, too, soon were brought to a standstill.

Twenty minutes passed. The column had not progressed ten yards. On the right, infantry units were retreating cross-country, westward. The police sergeant began fidgeting. He beckoned to his gendarmes. Their heads met above the stretcher in a whispered colloquy. "Damn it, we can't stay here all day, like stuck pigs! Why don't they get a move on with their lousy column? I been told off to do a job, ain't I, and that's to deliver this young fellow to the provost-sergeant this evening. Well, I'll take the responsibility. Follow me! Jump to it, boys!" The gendarmes complied at once. Thrusting aside the men around them, they picked up the stretcher, charged across the road, scrambled up the bank, and made off through the fields.

The headlong rush across the ditch and up the bank had drawn from Jacques a long, hoarse moan of •pain. Twisting his head, he tried to open his swollen lips. Another jolt. Another. Sky and trees swirled in a crimson mist. The plane was going up in flames, his legs blazing like torches, the red death clawing at his thighs, gnawing at his heart. The world went black. He fainted.

A violent impact jerked him back to consciousness. Where was he? The stretcher was lying in a meadow. How long had he been here? It seemed to have lasted days, this interminable journey. The light had changed; the sun was lower. It must be near sunset. Ah, to die! The extremity of pain was acting like an opiate. He felt as if he were buried so deep underground that jolts, sounds, voices came to him from far away, faint and blurred. Had he slept? Had it been a dream? A picture still held his eyes of a clump of acacias, a white goat browsing near it, a marsh into which the gendarmes' jackboots had sunk deep, splashing him with mud. He opened his eyes wide, trying to see. Marjoulat, Paoli, and the sergeant were on their knees. Some way off was a great heaving mass—a company lying flat. Their packs wedged together formed a vast, compact carapace pulsating on the grass.

Standing behind his men, a captain raked the horizon with his field-glasses. On the left was a knoll, with a shelving meadow on which a red-and-blue battalion was deployed fanwise, like a patience pack spread on a green baize card-table.

"What are we waiting for, Sarge?" "Orders." "If we had to run for it," Marjoulat remarked, "how'd we manage to get away with this fellow Chinaware on our hands?"

The captain, who had moved up to the police sergeant, lent him his field-glasses. Suddenly a cavalry troop galloped up from the right. The N.C.O. in front, a mere boy, was standing in his stirrups, the horse-tail of his helmet streaming in the wind. His eyes were sparkling with excitement, his gloved hand pointed eastward. "They're over there, behind the ridge. Not two miles off. Our rearguard must be in action by now."

His voice rang out clear and gay. Jacques had a glimpse of his face and through the twilight of his thoughts there flashed a memory of Daniel.

A metallic rattle broke out on all sides. Those around had heard what the young man had said and, without waiting for orders, were fixing bayonets. Their conduct was infectious; a forest of slim, shining blades seemed to spring up from the earth. All eyes swung round toward the unseen menace of that quiet hillside bathed in golden light. The horses were nibbling the lush grass. At a sign from their leader the troop fell in and trotted away. The captain in command reined up and shouted: "Tell them to send us orders!" Then, turning to the police sergeant, he added: "Ever seen anything like it? What the devil do they expect us to do when they leave us up in the air like this?" "Look here, Sarge," Marjoulat muttered, "ain't it time to make a move?" "Look! They've started over yonder." Paoli

pointed to the hillside where the battalion that had been deployed over the fields was doubling, in successive waves, toward the summit. Line by line the men were vanishing over the ridge. “Forward!” cried the captain. “Right!” the sergeant said. “It’s forward for us, too.”

The stretcher was yanked up hastily. Jacques moaned. No one listened, none took notice. Why couldn’t they leave him here and let him die in peace? Jolt upon jolt. Every fifty yards or so, the stretcher was dumped down and the gendarmes, kneeling, took breath before starting up the hill again. Around them troops were still advancing in short rushes. At last the gendarmes had come within a few yards of the ridge. The captain was standing just in front of them. “On the other side,” he said, “in the valley there’s a wood with a road running through it. We’ll be able to move south-west under cover. But no dawdling on the slope, mind you! It’s in full view.” The last batch of troops was sweeping over the crest. “Double!” “Follow them!” cried the sergeant. The stretcher was jerked up again; they reached the summit. A meadow dotted with small trees dropped down toward a wooded gorge, from which a forest stretched as far as eye could reach. “Make a beeline for the woods! Jump to it, boys!” A high-pitched shriek rent the air, swelled to the hurtling roar of an express train. Once again the stretcher dropped heavily to the ground. The gendarmes flung themselves on their faces among the soldiers, each with but one thought—to make himself as flat as possible, to wriggle into the yielding soil as soles burrow into the sand when the tide ebbs. There was a terrific crash in the wood on the far side of the ravine. Panic was visible on every face. “They’ve got us spotted.” “Move on, damn it!” “We’ll be shot to pieces in this lousy wood.” “Hop it to the gully, everyone!” Jumping to their feet, they charged down the slope, dropping under cover of every shrub and hummock on the way, then leaping up and running on again. The gendarmes followed, rocking the stretcher so violently that every joint creaked. At last they reached the wood. Jacques’s body was a quivering mass of bruised, mangled flesh. During the descent his whole weight had borne down upon his fractured legs. The leather straps had bitten into his thighs and shoulders. He had lost track of everything. When the stretcher crashed like a projectile into the undergrowth, he felt a sudden stinging swish of branches on his limbs, thorns tearing his cheeks and hands. For a moment he half opened his eyes; then a great peace descended on him. Life seemed ebbing from his body in a slow, warm, sickly-sweet stream like blood from a punctured artery. A dream of falling, falling through the void… . The plane, the leaflets… .

A fiery hiss as of a rocket rose on the air, zoomed overhead. There was a buzz of voices. Human sounds. He opened his eyes again. The stretcher lay on a bed of pine-needles, in a bower of green shadows. All around was a confused murmur; men fretting and fuming with impatience, unable to advance or turn, wedged into a solid mass, hampered by their equipment, their packs and rifles entangled in the brushwood. “Stop shoving!” “What are we waiting for?” “We’ve sent out scouts.” “Yes, got to make sure there ain’t no Germans in this wood before advancing.” Officers and N.C.O.’s were making frantic efforts to get their units together, but without success. “Stop talking!” “Company C, this way!” “Company B, fall in here!” Just beside the stretcher a man was leaning against a pine tree, overcome by profound, deathlike sleep. He was quite young, but his cheeks were hollow, grey, and wrinkled. His right arm pressed the rifle-butt stiffly to his waist as if he were preparing to present arms. “They say the third battalion’s been marched round to cover our flank.” “This way, lads!” The speaker was a corporal, a sturdy old peasant who was bustling his section into the wood like an old hen convoying her brood.

A lieutenant stepped across the stretcher; he had the arrogant yet flustered look of the officer who has lost grip but is out to save his face at all costs. “Now, then, N.C.O.’s, get the men to stop talking. Will you obey, yes or no, damn you! Section 1, fall in!” Grumbling, the men pushed their way forward, though in fact they asked for nothing better than to find themselves back among their comrades, taken charge of, officered again. Some were grinning, reassured by the near horizons of the wood, in an absurd belief that fighting stopped where open country ended and the trees began. Now and again a battalion runner, panting, perspiring, furious at being unable to find the officer he was looking for, pushed his way through the ranks and vanished into the undergrowth, after darting exasperated glances round him and bawling out the number of a regiment or a commanding officer’s name. Again a prolonged whistle, a sound less strident, crisper than before, skimmed the treetops. Everyone stopped talking and ducked; packs slid forward, humped bent shoulders. This time the explosion took place some way to the right. “That was a 75.” “No, a 77.” The gendarmes stood bunched round the stretcher as if it were the only justification of their presence here, in a stolid, compact group, staunch as a rock in the surging mass of men.

At the edge of the wood a voice rapped out a command. “At 1800 metres. At the hilltop, the black copse. Fire!” A volley jarred the air. Then a sudden hush fell on the wood. After another volley sporadic firing broke out in all directions. All who were anywhere near the edge of the wood had turned toward the meadows and brought their rifles to their shoulders; without waiting for orders, glad to have an opportunity at last of doing something, they fired blind across the leafage. The young man who had been leaning against the tree, asleep, was kneeling now at the foot of the stretcher and firing steadily, resting his rifle in the fork of a low branch. Each shot stung Jacques like a whiplash, but he was too weak now to open his eyes.

Crashing through the brushwood, three officers—a colonel and two majors—galloped up. A harsh voice barked out above the rattle of rifle-fire: “Who the devil gave you the order? Are you off your heads? What are you firing at? D’you want to have the whole brigade spotted by the enemy?” On all sides N.C.O.’s started yelling: “Cease fire! Fall in!” The firing stopped at once and, moved by a collective impulse, the clotted mass of men, who had seemed jammed beyond all possibility of extrication, swung round and formed up, facing in the same direction. Then, shoulder to shoulder, slowly, silently, they streamed across the wood, like a great flight of migratory birds, led by their officers. The rhythmic thudding of heavy boots on the soft carpet of pine-needles and a light metallic tinkle of canteens, mugs, and dixies filled the forest. A cloud of red dust, faintly odorous of resin, floated up through the leaves.

“What about us, Sarge?” The police sergeant had already come to a decision. “We’ll follow that lot.” “With Chinaware?” “Yes, damn it! Can’t leave him behind. Follow me, boys!” Lunging forward as if he were charging at the enemy, he butted his way into the stream of troops, with the two gendarmes other than the stretcher-bearers at his heels. The latter grasped the stretcher-handles hurriedly. “Ready, Marjoulat?” the Corsican panted. “Off we go!” But his efforts to wedge himself into the advancing ranks were unavailing; the stretcher was swept violently away each time. “Better wait,” Marjoulat advised him. “They’ll thin out a bit presently.” “*Basta!*” Paoli let his end of the stretcher drop with a thud. “I’ll run ahead and tell the sergeant to wait for us.” “No, no!” the old gendarme cried, dropping his end of the stretcher. “You can’t leave me like that, Paoli. It ain’t fair!” But the Corsican was already out of earshot. Nimble as an eel, he had wriggled into a gap in the ranks; his blue képi was swallowed up at once within the moving mass. “The devil!” Marjoulat muttered, and bent over Jacques as he had done before, to give him a drink. But now there was fury in his eyes. “You’ve given us enough trouble as it is, you swine!” But Jacques did not hear: he had fainted.

Thrusting aside the branches, the gendarme gripped the shoulder-strap of a passing soldier to detain him. “Give us a hand with this contraption.” “Ain’t a stretcher-bearer,” the man replied surlily, wrenching himself free. The gendarme noticed a fat, fair-haired, good-humoured-looking man coming up. “Give us a hand, chum!” “Nothing doing!” “What the hell am I to do with this here?” Marjoulat whimpered, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

The ranks were beginning to thin out. If Paoli came back now, they could make a start for sure! “Sir!” Marjoulat called timidly to a passing officer who was leading his horse. The officer did not so much as turn his head. The men passing now were the stragglers; they trudged forward, limping, staggering with fatigue, but spurred on by the dread of being left behind. No use appealing to them; none would dream of cumbering himself with a stretcher.

Suddenly from the fields beyond the wood there came a babble of voices, a sound of hurrying feet. Marjoulat went pale, swung round; instinctively his hand went to his holster and his fingers closed on the big police revolver. No, those were French voices. “This way, men. This way.” A wounded man showed up among the pines, moving blindly forward like a sleepwalker; there was a bandage round his forehead and his lips were white. A dozen men without packs or rifles plunged after him into the wood—walking wounded, with an arm in a sling, a bandaged hand or knee. “Is this the way, mate? Is that path safe? They ain’t far away, you know.” “What’s that?”—Marjoulat’s teeth were chattering—“Not far away?”

The branches parted again. A medical officer appeared, walking backward, clearing a path for two orderlies who had linked hands cradlewise and were carrying a fat man, bareheaded, with deathly pale cheeks. The unbuttoned jacket had four stripes; above the plump paunch the shirt was bloodstained. “Easy, men. Easy does it.” The medical officer caught sight of Marjoulat with Jacques lying at his feet. He spun round at once. “Ah, a stretcher! Who is it? What’s a civilian doing here?” Marjoulat, standing at attention, stammered awkwardly: “It’s a spy, sir.” “What? A spy! Well, that’s the limit. Shift him off; I need that stretcher for the major here. Get on with it.”

Obediently the gendarme started unbuckling straps, undoing the thongs. A tremor passed through Jacques’s body; his hand stirred feebly, he opened his eyes. A medical officer. Antoine …? He made desperate efforts to understand, to remember. The agony was past. They were setting him free, they would quench his thirst. But—what were they doing now? The stretcher was jerked up. A weak cry broke from his lips. Why need they be so rough? Excruciating torture; the fractured bones were piercing his flesh like red-hot needles, jabbing every nerve and sinew of his mangled legs. No one saw his mouth convulsed with agony, his eyes wide with horror and amaze. He was tipped out of the stretcher like a sand-bag from a wheelbarrow. He fell on his side with a low groan, and suddenly a mortal chill came creeping up, slowly, implacably, from his limbs toward his heart.

The gendarme had made no protest. Now he was gazing timidly about him. The medical officer studied his map, while the orderlies rapidly laid the wounded major, whose shirt was now a mass of blood, upon the stretcher. Marjoulat asked in a quavering voice: “Is it true, sir, that they’re quite near?”

An eerie wail rent the air, followed by a violent concussion close at hand that seemed to make his brain jump in his skull. Almost at once a rat-tat-tat of rifle-fire broke out in the meadows bordering the wood.

“Forward,” the doctor cried, “or we’ll be caught between two fires! We’re goners if we stay here.”

Like the others, Marjoulat had thrown himself flat at the moment of the shell-burst. As he dragged himself laboriously to his feet, he saw the stretcher being carted away and the file of wounded men vanishing behind the trees. Piteously he yelled after them: “Hey, now? What about me? Don’t leave me behind, mates!” A sergeant with a bandaged wrist who was bringing up the rear turned and glared at him but did not stop. “What about me?” Marjoulat wailed again. “What the hell am I to do with this here bird?” The sergeant, a veteran with cheeks bronzed by service in the colonies, raised his unwounded arm and, shaping his fingers into a megaphone, yelled ‘Whatcher worrying about a goddam spy? Plug him one, you fool, and have done with the bastard! And take my tip: get a move on or you’ll be caught before you know where you are.”

“What the hell am I to do?” Marjoulat repeated helplessly.

But now there was no answer. He was alone with this corpselike body with closed eyes, lying on its side before him. Silence, an eerie, sinister hush, had fallen on the forest. “They’re not far off.” “Plug him one, you fool!” The words echoed in his fuddled brain. He plunged his hand into his revolver-holster. His eyes were pale with terror. He had never killed—not even an animal. And, doubtless, had Jacques’s eyes opened, had Marjoulat met their living gaze for but one instant, his courage would have failed him. But it seemed as if already life had left that bloodless face, that temple lying flat, inert, helplessly prostrate at his feet. Looking away, the gendarme thrust the hand gripping the revolver downward. His lips were twitching, his features contorted with horror. The muzzle touched something.

A lock of hair? An ear? To nerve himself, and by the same token to justify himself, he cried, gritting his teeth: “Scum!” Word and detonation rang out at the same moment. Free at last! The gendarme drew himself up hastily and, without looking back, plunged into the brushwood. Branches lashed his cheeks, dry twigs crackled underfoot. The retreating troops had left a wide track trampled flat across the undergrowth. His mates were only a little way ahead. He was saved! He took to his heels—in headlong flight from peril, from isolation, from the man he had killed. He held his breath so as to keep the pace, and at each spurt, to vent his rancour and fright, snarled through his clenched teeth: “The scum! The filthy scum!”

# PART VIII

**EPILOGUE**

## Chapter I

"HI THERE, Pierret! Don't you hear the phone?"

The orderly on duty in the office had taken advantage of the hour when the ground floor of the hospital was empty (all the staff and patients being upstairs for the morning course of treatments) to stroll onto the terrace and bask for a moment in the sunny, jasmine-scented air. Dropping his cigarette, he ran to the telephone.

"Hello!"

"Hello! Grasse postoffice speaking. We've a telegram here for Le Mousquier Hospital."

"Just a minute." The orderly drew toward him a writing-pad and pencil. "All right. Go ahead."

The postal clerk had already begun dictating: "*Paris, May 3, 1918. 7:15. To Dr. Thibault, Gas Casualties Hospital, Le Mousquier, near Grasse.* Got it?"

"Near Grasse," the orderly repeated. "Go on."

"*Aunt de Waize*. Waize with a '*z*.' W-a-i-z-e. Got it? *Aunt de Waize died yesterday. Stop. Funeral Sunday ten o'clock at the Point-du-Jour Home. Stop. Love, Gise.* G-i-s-e. That's all. Wait, I'll read it over again."

As the orderly approached the staircase after crossing the hall, an elderly attendant wearing a white apron and carrying a tray appeared at the kitchen door.

"Going upstairs, Ludovic? Be a good fellow and take this telegram for No. 53."

No. 53 was empty, the bed made, the room tidied up. Going to the open window, Ludovic glanced out into the garden, but could see no sign of Dr. Thibault there, either. A number of convalescent officers and men, in blue pyjamas and canvas shoes, some wearing képis, others forage-caps, were strolling in the sunshine, in twos and threes. Others were seated, reading newspapers, in deck-chairs placed on the shady side of a row of cypresses.

The infusion on Ludovic's tray was cooling down. Hastily picking it up again, he turned into Room 57. For two weeks now No. 57 had been confined to bed. His shoulders propped up with pillows, his unshorn cheeks glistening with sweat, his features lined and haggard, he was fighting for breath; the sound of his gasps could be heard far down the corridor. Ludovic measured out two spoonfuls of medicine into the infusion and, as the patient brought the mug to his lips, supported his shoulders to make it easier for him to drink. After emptying the spittoon into the basin and bestowing a few encouraging remarks, he hurried out to look for Dr. Thibault. Just to make sure, before leaving the floor, he looked into Room 49. The colonel, slumped in a wicker armchair, his spittoon beside him, was playing bridge with three other officers. Dr. Thibault was not among them.

"He must be in the inhaling-room," suggested Dr. Bardot, whom Ludovic encountered at the foot of the stairs. "Give me the telegram; I'm just going up."

Their heads hooded with towels, several patients were bending over the inhalers. Silence reigned in the little room; the atmosphere was like that of a steam-bath, reeking with fumes of menthol and eucalyptus, and so dense that it was almost impossible to see across it.

"Are you there, Thibault? Here's a wire for you."

Antoine's head emerged from a cocoon of towels, flushed and beaded with perspiration. After sponging his eyes, he took the telegram Bardot held out to him and opened it.

"Not bad news, I hope?"

Antoine shook his head. In a hollow, brittle, toneless voice, he replied: "It's to announce the death of … an old lady, a distant relative."

Slipping the telegram into his pyjama-pocket, he plunged his head again under the hood of towels.

Bardot tapped his shoulder. "Your report's in from the lab. Come over to my room and see it, when you've finished here."

Dr. Bardot was of the same generation as Antoine. They had met in the old days in Paris as medical students. But Bardot had been suddenly obliged to cut short his studies and spend two years under treatment at a high altitude. He had been cured, but as his health remained precarious and he dared not face the Paris winters, he had taken his degrees at the Montpellier Medical Institute. He had specialized in diseases of the lungs, and the outbreak of war found him in charge of a sanatorium in South-West France. In 1916 Prof. Sègre, under whom he had studied at Montpellier, had asked him to collaborate in the management of a gas casualties hospital he had been instructed to establish on the Riviera. Together they had organized Le Mousquier Hospital near Grasse, in which fifteen officers and some sixty men were now undergoing treatment.

It was toward the end of November 1917 that Antoine, in the course of a medical inspection on the Champagne front, had been caught in a mustard-gas attack; after having been unsuccessfully treated at various field hospitals, he had finally been sent to Le Mousquier at the end of the following month.

It happened Antoine was the only medical officer gas casualty in the Officers' Section of Le Mousquier Hospital. Their association in earlier days naturally drew him and Bardot together, though temperamentally they were poles apart. Bardot was an introspective type of man, painstaking, with little initiative or willpower. What he had in common with Antoine was a wholehearted devotion to his calling and a high sense of his professional responsibilities. They soon discovered that (as Antoine described it to himself) they "spoke the same language," and a warm friendship had sprung up between them. Bardot, to whom Prof. Sègre left all the executive tasks of the hospital, had no great liking for his assistant, Dr. Mazet, a former medical officer of the colonial army, who had been given his present post after being severely wounded at the front. This made him all the more disposed to impart to Antoine his theories and problems, to solicit Antoine's opinion and keep him posted as to the progress of his research work in this new and, so far, relatively uncharted field of medicine. Naturally there could be no question of Antoine's aiding Bardot in his duties. His state of health did not permit it, in any case. He was subject to frequent relapses, and it was all he could do to look after himself and follow the elaborate course of treatment his malady required. Still, this did not prevent him from displaying a keen interest in die case-histories of the other patients and, whenever a turn for the better gave him a short lease of energy, he made a point of attending

Bardot's consultations, taking a hand in his experiments, and sometimes even joining in the nightly conferences which took place in Prof. Sègre's study, along with Bardot and Mazet. Thanks to these activides, he found the atmosphere of the hospital less trying, for he led there the life not merely of a patient but, at whiles, of a physician too. And thus he felt less cut off from all the things which for the last fifteen years, in peacetime as in war, had constituted his true, indeed his only, interest in life.

When the inhalation was over, Antoine knotted a scarf round his neck as a precaution against the cooler air outside and went downstairs to join his friend, who every morning spent half an hour in the annex, fitted out as a gymnasium, supervising the breathing-exercises he had prescribed for certain patients.

Standing among them, Bardot seemed conducting, smilingly intent, a raucous symphony of straining lungs. He topped the tallest of those present by several inches, and his premature baldness disclosed a high-domed forehead that made him seem taller still. The bulk of his body was in keeping with his height; this former consumptive was a positive colossus, and from shoulders to waist, the burly back, under the close-fitting surgical jacket, showed as an almost perfect square, majestically proportioned.

"Good news," he said, leading Antoine at once into the small recess which served as dressing-room, where they could talk without being overheard. "I confess I was a bit afraid… . But there was no albumin. A good sign."

He took a slip of paper tucked inside his coat-cuff and handed it to Antoine, who ran his eyes over it. "I'll give this back to you tonight, after I've copied it." From the time he had been gassed, Antoine had kept up, in a special diary, a detailed clinical record of his case.

"You spend the devil of a time in the inhaling-room!" There was disapproval in Bardot's voice. "Sure it doesn't tire you?"

"Not a bit. I'm a great believer in these inhalations." Antoine's voice was weak and rather breathless, but clear. "When I wake, the mucus in my larynx causes complete aphonia. But, as you see, my voice comes back pretty effectively once I've scoured my throat with a good strong inhalation."

Bardot refused to be convinced. "All very well, but don't overdo it. Aphonia's a nuisance, I grant, but it's a lesser evil. Too much inhaling may very well cut short the cough prematurely." The drawling, melodious voice bespoke him for a Burgundian and seemed to enhance the gentleness and gravity of his expression.

He had provided Antoine with a chair, and now sat down himself. He always tried to give his patients an impression that he was not in a hurry, but had ample leisure to devote to them, and that nothing interested him more than hearing every detail of their symptoms.

After asking Antoine how he had felt during the previous day and if he had slept well, he added: "I advise you to start in again one of these days with an expectorant. Terpin or drosera—as you prefer. In a cup of borage tea. Yes, yes, it's an old wives' remedy, I know. But there's nothing like a good profuse sweat just before going to sleep—provided, of course, you take care not to catch a chill." The way his voice lingered on certain vowels gave his speech a fervour of the "warm South," the vibrant richness of the low notes of a 'cello.

He had a weakness for lavishing advice on his patients, staunchly believed in the efficacy of his treatments, and refused to be discouraged by any setback. And there was nothing he liked better than to impart this faith of his to a listener—especially to Antoine, whose superior intelligence he frankly admitted to himself without a shade of jealousy.

"If you want to reduce your expectoration at night," he went on, his eyes still fixed on Antoine, "why not try the sulpho-arsenical treatment for a few days? Don't you agree?" he added, turning to Dr. Mazet, who had just come in.

Mazet did not answer. He had opened a closet at the far end of the room and was changing from his khaki army jacket—threadbare and faded by repeated washing, but lavishly beribboned—into a white coat. A faint odour of perspiration hovered in the air.

"If the aphonia gets more pronounced," Bardot observed, "we can always fall back again on strychnine. It had excellent results last winter with Chapuis."

Mazet swung round with a guffaw. "Chapuis! Well, I must say you might have chosen a more encouraging example …"

Mazet had a square skull, a low forehead cleft by a deep scar, and a thick growth of stubbly greying hair that came down low on his temples. Under the effect of any emotion the whites of his eyes grew bloodshot. The sleek black moustache stood out sharply against his skin, tanned by years of service overseas.

Antoine looked inquiringly at Bardot.

"Fortunately there's no parallel between Thibault's case and Chapuis's," Bardot made haste to declare; but he was unable to conceal his vexation. "Poor Chapuis is in a bad way, I'm afraid," he explained, turning again to Antoine. "He had a very bad night. I was called to his room twice. Heart in an alarming state; he has irregular extrasys-toles all the time. When the Chief comes this morning, I shall take him straight to No. 57."

Mazet, as he buttoned his coat, had joined them. For some moments they discussed the various cardiovascular complications due to mustard gas, "which take various forms," Bardot pointed out, "according to the patient's age." (Chapuis, an artillery colonel, was in the fifties and had been under treatment for eight months.)

"And according to his constitution," Antoine added.

Chapuis's room was next to that of Antoine, who had several times listened to his chest and had formed the opinion that the colonel, before being gassed, had suffered from mitral incompetence—a circumstance which neither Sègre, nor Bardot, nor Mazet seemed to have suspected. He was on the point of mentioning his discovery. Even more than in the past, his pride was apt to be agreeably titillated by catching a colleague in a mistake—even a colleague whom he liked personally—and pointing out his blunders. It was a mild, if slightly malicious, compensation for the feeling of inferiority that illness had imposed on him. But talking was an effort, and he refrained.

"Had a look at the papers today?" Mazet asked.

Antoine shook his head.

"It seems the German push in Flanders is definitely held up," Bardot remarked.

"Yes, it looks that way," Mazet agreed. "Ypres is holding out, and the British official reports state that all attacks on the Yser line have been repulsed."

"Must have cost them a lot in lives," Antoine said.

Mazet's shoulders lifted in a vague gesture that might have signified: "The devil of a lot" or, equally: "Well, what of it?" Then he went back to the closet, fumbled in the pockets of his jacket, and walked up to Antoine. "As it happens, I've a Swiss paper here—Goiran passed it on to me. If we're to believe the German communiqué, the British had over two hundred thousand casualties in one month, April, on the Yser front alone."

"The public in the Allied countries," Bardot observed, "would be rather startled if they heard those figures."

Antoine nodded; Mazet broke into a loud guffaw and, as he went out of the room, flung over his shoulder: "Don't worry! The public only knows what it's allowed to know. There's a war on!"

He always gave the impression of regarding others as fools.

When he had left the room Bardot turned to Antoine. "Do you know what struck me this morning? That nowadays, in every country, the government has ceased to be representative of public opinion. On neither side has anyone the least idea of what the masses really are thinking; the voices of the rulers drown the voices of the ruled. Take France, for instance. Do you think there's one Frenchman in twenty at the front who's so keen on Alsace and Lorraine that he'd willingly prolong the war for a single month to get them back?"

"Not one in fifty."

"And yet the whole world is firmly convinced that Clemenceau and Poincaré are the mouthpieces of public opinion in France! This war has bred an atmosphere of lies, official lies, that's wholly without precedent. And it's the same thing everywhere. I wonder if there'll ever come a time again when people are allowed to say what they really think, if the European press will ever regain—"

He stopped short. Prof. Sègre had entered the room.

The professor acknowledged the two doctors' greetings with a military salute. He shook Bardot's hand, but not Antoine's. A dapper little man, with a tip-tilted chin, hook-nose, and wiglike, fluffy white hair, he brought to mind certain caricatures of M. Thiers. Obviously he devoted much care to his clothes and personal appearance. Curt of speech, he was polite but distant even with his colleagues. He kept severely to himself and rarely left his private office, in which he even took his meals. An indefatigable worker, he spent his days writing articles on the clinical treatment of gas cases for the medical press, drawing his data from case-histories supplied by Bardot and Mazet. His contacts with the patients were limited to a greeting when the patient entered hospital and a bedside visit if he took a sudden turn for the worse.

Antoine watched their receding forms, thinking: A good sort, Bardot. It's a stroke of luck for me, his being here.

He usually went back to his bedroom at that hour, to continue his treatment and rest till noon. Often the morning inhalation and breathing-exercises left him so exhausted that he dozed off in his armchair and remained thus till the lunch gong woke him with a start.

He rose and followed the two doctors, at a few paces' distance. Suddenly he thought: All the same, if it had been my fate to die here, all the friendship of a fellow like Bardot wouldn't have helped me in the least.

He walked slowly, saving his breath. He had two flights of stairs to climb and, if he failed to take the necessary precautions, the effort sometimes brought on a pain in his side, not particularly acute, but lasting several hours before subsiding.

Joseph had forgotten again to draw the blind, with the result that swarms of flies were buzzing round the shelves on which he kept his medicines. A fly-swatter hung on the wall, but Antoine felt too limp to start a fly-swatting foray. Without a glance for the entrancing scene which lay before his window, he pulled down the blind, sank into his easy-chair, and closed his eyes for a moment. Then, taking the telegram from his pocket, he read it through again.

Well, she had lived her span out, poor old Mademoiselle, and life held nothing more for her to do but to say good-bye to it. What was it she used to say? "I don't want to be a drag on anybody, now I'm too old to be of any use… ." And she had set her mind on entering the Superannuates' Home. That was soon after Father's death. In December 1913, or perhaps January 1914. May 1918 now. What ages ago it seems! A picture rose before him of the old lady: the little yellow forehead framed in neat grey braids, the wizened, ivory-pale hands trembling as she plied her knife and fork, the tiny eyes that took on the expression of a startled llama whenever someone addressed her. She grew panicky at everything: a mouse in a cupboard, a distant rumble of thunder, the news of a plague death in Marseille, of an earthquake shock in Sicily. A banging door or an overshrill ring at the bell made her gasp with fright. "Bless and save us!" Then, awaiting the worst, she would fold her skinny arms under the black silk cape she always called her "mantle." And that laugh of hers—for she was always laughing, and often over the merest trifle—a tinkling, carefree laugh like a young girl's! … Yes, she must have been quite attractive in her girlhood; one could picture her playing badminton with her schoolmates at some provincial girls' school, a black velvet band round her neck, her long plaits neatly gathered in a hair-net. What can her girlhood have been like? he wondered. She never breathed a word about it. None of us ever questioned her. I wonder what her Christian name was? None of us knew it; to all intents and purposes it had ceased to exist. In fact, we didn't refer to her by name at all; she was just "Mademoiselle." Named after her functions—much as we spoke of "the concierge" or, for that matter, "the elevator." Father inspired in her a sort of religious veneration, and for twenty years without a break she put up with his tyranny. For twenty years she went about her duties unnoticed, indefatigable, unheard. She was the driving force that kept our home going, but no one ever gave her a word of thanks for her pains and her devotion to our welfare. Yes, she gave up her life to others; a life of modesty, self-denial, self-effacement; and in her tactful, timid way she loved us too—but how little love we gave her in return!

"Gise must be terribly upset about it," he said aloud. He did not feel quite certain of this, but needed to convince himself of it, invoking Gise's grief to make amends for past injustice.

This means, he thought, I'll have to write a letter—hang it! (Once on active service, he had cut down his correspondence to the strict minimum and, since his illness, had practically given up letter-writing. Now and then, however, he sent a brief postcard to Gise, Philip, Studler, or Jousselin.) Finally he decided to dispatch a long telegram at once; this would give him a few days' breathing-space before writing the inevitable letter. Suddenly he asked himself: "Why did she mention the hour of the funeral? Surely she can't have imagined I'd go all the way to Paris to attend it?"

He had not set foot in Paris since the outbreak of the war. There seemed no point in going there now that all the people he would have liked to meet again were mobilized, like himself. The idea of revisiting his empty apartment, of wandering through his closed and disused laboratories, did not appeal to him. Whenever his turn came for leave he had always made it over to some brother officer. At the front, anyhow, he had been obliged to lead a full and active life and it had helped him to keep from thinking. Only once, just

before the Somme offensive, when he was at Abbeville, had he brought himself to take a few days' leave. He had travelled to Dieppe and settled down by himself in rooms there. But the atmosphere of this town, in which he had nothing to do, what with the smell of fish and seawrack, the never-ending drizzle, and the hordes of British wounded everywhere in evidence, had depressed him; after two days he had had his fill of it, hurried to the station, and rejoined his regiment. Since the outbreak of the war he had not once seen Gise—or Jenny, or Philip, or any companion of the old days. He had not even allowed Gise to come and visit him during his convalescence at Saint-Dizier, after he had been wounded for the first time. The affectionate but laconic notes she sent him every two or three months enabled him to keep in contact, if only vaguely and at second hand, with the life of those behind the lines and with his past.

It was by letter he had learned that Jenny was pregnant, and by letter that the rumour of Jacques's death had been definitely confirmed. In the course of the winter of 1915 Jenny, with whom he had already been in correspondence on fairly intimate lines, had written to say she wanted to go to Geneva. She gave two reasons for this desire: for one thing, she preferred to be away from her family, by herself, when the child was born; also, a stay in Switzerland would enable her to make inquiries about Jacques's death, the circumstances of which still remained something of a mystery. Jenny had kept in touch with the revolutionary group Jacques had frequented; all they could tell her was that rumour had it Jacques had disappeared at the beginning of August when engaged on "a dangerous mission."

It had struck Antoine that Rumelles, who still held his post in the Foreign Office, might be able to help, and he advised Jenny to call at the Quai d'Orsay. Rumelles did not have much trouble in getting the necessary permit for Jenny. In Geneva Jenny had met Vanheede, and the little albino had helped her in her quest. He had accompanied her to Basel and introduced her to Plattner. Thus at last she had been able to obtain first-hand news of Jacques's last days. She was told about the printing of the leaflets; how Jacques had gone to meet Meynestrel on the hilltop, and they had taken off at daybreak on August 10 and flown toward the Alsatian front. There Planner's information ended. But when Jenny had passed it on to Antoine, he persuaded Rumelles to have inquiries made. A scrutiny of the lists of prisoners in German camps drew blank, but finally Rumelles unearthed a report in the records of the War Office in Paris, emanating from the headquarters of an infantry division operating in Alsace and dated August 10. The report in question dealt mainly with the French retreat in Alsace, but contained a mention that a plane had fallen in flames in the French lines. The pilot and his passenger had perished in the fire and could not be identified. It had been ascertained, on inspection of the wreckage, that the plane was a civil machine of Swiss origin. The report added that a number of bundles of charred paper had been found in the cockpit; from what could be deciphered on some sheets it was evident that the plane had been loaded with propaganda of a violently anti-militarist nature. There could be no doubt about it: the bodies found were those of Jacques and his pilot. A futile end, however one might look at it! Antoine had never been able to stomach its ineptitude, and even now, after a lapse of four years, the thought of it outraged him even more than it distressed him.

Springing to his feet, he jerked the fly-swatter off its hook and ragefully slaughtered a dozen flies, then began driving the others out with his towel. But a sudden fit of coughing came over him and he had to stop, bent almost double, resting both hands on the back of the armchair. As soon as he could straighten himself up, he steeped a compress in turpentine and applied it to his chest. This gave him some relief; going to the bed, he fetched two pillows and, putting them behind him, sat down again. Sitting bolt-upright to avoid hypostasis, he cautiously began his breathing-exercises, squeezing his larynx between thumb and forefinger and doing his best to emit perfectly clear vowel sounds, sustaining them longer and longer at each phonation: "A … e … i … o … u… ."

Meanwhile his eyes roved round the cell-like and blatantly commonplace room. The walls were daubed a pale brick-red that near the ceiling gave place to a frieze of brown convolvuli winding their futile way around the moulding. That morning a sea-breeze was fluttering the blind and the walls were dappled with glints of sunlight. Above the mirror someone had pinned a magazine picture showing a row of six American chorus girls raising aloft six shapely legs with high-arched insteps. It was the sole survivor of the numerous works of art with which Antoine's predecessor, shortly before his death, had adorned the room. Antoine had succeeded in eliminating the others, but the six high-kickers were out of reach and he did not care to face the strain of trying to dislodge them. He had often thought of getting Joseph, the room orderly, to remove this final eyesore, but Joseph was short of stature and the step-ladder was kept on the ground floor; finally Antoine had decided to ignore it. The small deal table was stacked with old newspapers, war-maps, magazines, and phonograph records, wedged among which were a white-china spittoon and an array of medicine-bottles and pill-boxes. When he sat down at night to write up his case-history from observations noted during the day, it was all he could do to find a place for the notebook. The glass shelf above the wash-basin was equally encumbered with medicines. Between the table and the deal wardrobe in which he kept his clothes and personal effects, an empty medicine-chest stood upended with an inscription, still legible though the letters had been almost rubbed away: "Capt. Thibault, M.O., 2nd Batt." It now served as stand for a decrepit phonograph.

It would soon be nearly five months that Antoine had been cribbed and confined within these brick-red walls, noting the vicissitudes of his disease and watching in vain for definite signs of improvement. Nearly five months he had suffered in this room, counted the slow-paced hours, eaten and drunk and coughed; started reading books that he had never finished, brooded on the past and toyed with future prospects, received visitors, bandied jokes, argued about the war and the peace to follow it, until his breath gave out. That bed, that chair, and that spittoon—mute witnesses of his hours of fever, choking-fits, and sleepless nights—how he had come to loathe them! Luckily he was still well enough to go downstairs fairly often and escape the boredom of this ugly little sickroom. When he went down, he usually took a book with him—not to read, but to ensure a measure of solitude—-and took cover in the cypress avenue or the olive-grove; sometimes he went as far as the bottom of the vegetable garden, where there was a Persian wheel and the running water gave an illusion of coolness in the air. At other times, when he felt up to keeping on his feet, he would join Bardot and Mazet in the laboratory. The moment he entered, he breathed a congenial atmosphere. Bardot lent him a white coat, and welcomed his collaboration. True, on leaving, he usually felt dead-beat, but those hours in the laboratory were the highlights of his present life.

If only he could have employed this enforced leisure, these months of waiting for his health to mend, to some profit, with a view to the future! He had several times tried to begin working on his own account. But each time there had been a relapse, compelling him to abandon the attempt before any real progress had been made. One project, especially, tempted him: the idea of embodying in a monograph all the data he had collected, before the war, on diseases of the respiratory system in children and their influence on

mental development and the power of attention. He had collected ample material for a short book or, anyhow, a lengthy article in a professional journal. He was eager to have it published at the earliest opportunity, for the subject was in the air and Antoine ran the risk of being forestalled by some other child-specialist. But even if his health proved equal to this task, there was no possibility of tackling it at once, as all his case-books and research notes were in Paris. And there was no way of getting them sent to him. His young assistant Manuel Roy had been reported missing, with his entire section, after an attack near Arras in the second month of the war. Jousselin had been taken prisoner in 1916 and was now interned somewhere in Silesia. Wounded in the same year at Verdun, the Caliph had recovered, but his hearing had been affected; he had specialized in X-ray work and been recently assigned to a hospital unit on the eastern front.

The first clang of the gong announcing lunch brought Antoine to his feet. He switched on the lamp above the wash-basin and, opening his mouth, examined the back of his throat. Before going down to meals he usually had to spray his throat so as to make swallowing less painful; some days, however, his throat was so inflamed that he had to call on Bardot and have it cauterized.

While waiting for the second gong to sound, he drew his chair to the window and pulled up the blind. Facing him was a wide expanse of cultivated fields, stepped-in terraces along a receding slope that ended on a rock-bound summit; to his right the undulating crestline of the Riviera hills, veiled in a shimmering heat-haze, rolled seaward to the blue horizon. From the garden immediately below, there drifted up a sound of voices, the scent of flowers. Leaning out of the window, he watched the patients strolling up and down the cypress avenue. A familiar scene, familiar faces. There was Goiran with his boon companion, Voisenet (they were the only patients who had kept their vocal cords intact and they never stopped talking from morn to night). That was Darros, a book as usual under his arm; the man beyond him was Eckmann, known as "Kangaroo"; just below the window was Major Reymond, surrounded by a group of junior officers, at his usual morning occupation of expounding the latest communiqué, with a map spread out in front of him. As he watched them sauntering to and fro, wagging their heads, gesticulating, he seemed to hear each word that was uttered, and he felt almost as bored as if he had been down there among them.

The gong boomed a second time and the whole garden woke to feverish life, like a panic-stricken anthill.

Antoine straightened up with a sigh. "That gong is really too lugubrious for words. Why can't they have an ordinary dinner-bell?"

He was not feeling hungry, and really, he decided, it was more than he could face, the prospect of once again tramping down those two flights of stairs, of enduring the smell of food, the noise and clatter, the promiscuity of the hospital mess. To have to listen with an amiable smile to the eternal discussion of Germany's next move, forecasts of the war's duration, theories of the hidden meanings latent in the last communiqué—all of it spiced with the same old feeble jokes, reminiscences of the front, smutty stories, and, worst of all, naive revelations of the amount of spitting indulged in during the night or the exact look of certain mucous surfaces.

About to change from his pyjama coat into an old white drill jacket with three stripes on the sleeve, he took from his pocket Gise's telegram, and suddenly stopped short.

"Supposing I went there?"

He could not help smiling at the absurdity of the idea. Obviously he would do nothing of the kind, and this assurance left his imagination free to dally with the project, fantastic though it was. Of course it was feasible enough, in itself. He would have to take precautions and bring with him an inhaler and his whole outfit of medicines, so as not to interrupt the treatment. There would be no special risk of a relapse. "*Funeral Sunday ten o'clock*." If he took the afternoon express tomorrow, Saturday, he would be in Paris Sunday morning. Sègre would make no trouble about letting him go; had he not given that fellow Dosse, ill though he was, a few days' leave? A jaunt to Paris was really rather tempting, now he came to think of it. And its unexpectedness made it all the more alluring.

Suddenly he pictured himself as in pre-war days—in the days when life was easy and his health intact—seated, silent and alone, at a little table in the dining-car.

In Paris he would be able to consult his old chief Philip about his health. And, better still, he could collect his case-histories, and come back with a handbag full of files and reference books, which would enable him to set to work, to turn to some account this irksome, never-ending convalescence.

Paris! Two or three days' escape from durance, two or three days without the daily promiscuity of the mess.

After all—why not?

# Chapter II

THERE was a click, and the little window in the gate-keeper's lodge opened a cautious inch. Antoine had a brief glimpse of a blue-canvas sleeve, a wizened hand, the flash of a gold ring. From her dim retreat the voice of the gate-keeper came to him, mumbling: "Straight in front of you, sir, at the end of the passage, in the courtyard."

A bare, tiled corridor, spotlessly clean, led off the entrance-hall into the silent depths of the main building. On entering the corridor, Antoine noticed on his left two old women with black crocheted shawls wrapped round their shoulders, squatting on the lowest step of a staircase; bending toward each other, whispering in each other's ears, they brought to mind a pair of aged actresses playing the role of gossips.

Bathed on three sides in sunlight, the courtyard was empty. A chapel occupied the entire length of the farther side; one of the doors stood open on a shadowy interior from which issued the strains of a harmonium. Evidently the service had begun. Antoine went up to the door. As his eyes got used to the darkness, he made out a cluster of tiny candle-flames. The floor of the' chapel was lower than the courtyard and he had to go down two steps on entering. Cautiously he groped his way between a group of undertaker's men waiting in the aisle. There seemed to be a large congregation in the little nave, the atmosphere of which was dank as in a crypt. Resting one hand on the holy-water stoup, Antoine propped himself up on tiptoe and gazed toward the bier, which was loosely draped in black with four candles at the corners. Standing behind the humble catafalque was a little old white-haired, bespectacled man, with his arms folded; beside him knelt a hospital nurse, her face hidden by a blue veil. When she turned her head, Antoine recognized Gise. "So the poor old thing had no other relative, no friends," he mused. "No one except that old idiot Chasle. It's a good thing I came. Jenny's not here; nor's *Mme.* de Fontanin, or Daniel. All the better. I'll ask Gise not to tell them that I'm here; that will spare me a trip to Maisons-Laffitte." He cast a final glance of inspection along the half-dozen rows of tightly packed pews. No, there was no one he knew in any of them; only old women in shawls and a few nuns with broad-winged coifs. "I'll never be able to keep standing till the end—quite apart from the fact that it's rather cold in here." As he turned to leave the chapel, there was a rustle, a creaking of pews; the congregation was settling down to kneel. The officiating priest, raising his hands, turned toward the aisle. Antoine recognized the tall, spare form and the bald, domed forehead; it was the Abbe Vecard.

He walked up the steps again and out into the courtyard. Noticing a bench in the sun, he sat down. There was a dull ache between his shoulder-blades. Still, the long railway journey had not tired him as much as might have been expected; it had been possible to lie down most of the night. It was the trip from the Gare de Lyon to the home in an aged taxi, bumping along the cobbled roads beside the Seine, that had been too much for him.

A tiny coffin, he thought. No bigger than a child's. Pictures took form before his eyes of Mademoiselle pattering briskly to and fro in his father's apartment or seated in her room, perched on the edge of a high chair facing the window at the marquetry writing-desk —her "family heirloom," as she called it—which was the only personal effect she brought with her when she came to keep house for M. Thibault. It had a secret drawer in which she kept the money for the household expenses; in it she preserved her sentimental relics, hoarded her savings. She had special compartments for bills, for her notepaper, and her box of vanilla; drawers in which she heaped up the pencil-stubs discarded by M. Thibault, leaflets and prescriptions, her needles and thread, her buttons, her can of rat-poison, her sticking-plaster, sachets of iris petals and tincture of arnica, all the old house-keys, prayer-books and photos, the cucumber lotion she used to soften her hands and the rather sickening smell of which, mingling with that of the vanilla and the sachets, drifted out into the hall whenever her door was opened. For Antoine and Jacques, when they were little, Mademoiselle's escritoire had had the glamour of a fairy treasure-hoard. Later on, Jacques and Gise had nicknamed it "the Village Postoffice" for its resemblance to those little country postoffices where odds and ends of every sort are sold.

A sound of heavy footfalls made him look up. The men in black had opened the second half of the door and were laying out the wreaths on the ground in the courtyard. Antoine rose.

The service was ending. Two white-aproned nuns towing at their heels a large wheeled basket laden with vegetables passed by with lowered eyes and hastily swerved off into one of the buildings. On the first floor the blinds were being drawn up and decrepit old women in dressing-jackets were gathering around the windows. Such of the old people as were able to hobble about had attended the service; they now came out and formed up in groups on either side of the porch. The harmonium had ceased playing. From the darkness emerged a silver cross, a surplice, then the bier carried by two men. Some choir boys followed, then an old priest, and, after him, the Abbe Vecard.

At last Gise walked up the steps and out into the light. M. Chasle was behind her. The pall-bearers halted to enable the undertaker's men to put back the wreaths on the coffin. Gise's eyes, dim with tears, were fixed on the bier. Antoine was struck by the look of maturity on her face, seen thus in pensive contemplation; for somehow his memories of her had crystallized round the little fifteen-year-old girl of long ago. He guessed she had not seen him, had not dreamed he would attend the funeral, and the thought that he was thus observing her unaware made him feel a shade embarrassed. He had forgotten that her skin was so dark a brown. It must be the white band across her forehead, he supposed, that made her complexion seem so much darker.

M. Chasle was wearing black gloves and carrying a top-hat of an outmoded pattern. He was craning his neck and twisting his birdlike little head this side and that. Suddenly his gaze lit on Antoine and his hand went to his mouth as if to check an exclamation. Gise looked round and she too saw Antoine, but for the first two seconds did not seem to have recognized him. Then she ran forward, bursting into tears, and flung herself into his arms. He kissed her, rather awkwardly. Noticing that the pall-bearers had started off again, he gently freed himself from her embrace.

"Keep beside me," she whispered. "Please, Antoine dear."

She went back to her place behind the bier. He followed her. With startled eyes, M. Chasle watched them approach.

"Ah, so it's you," he muttered, as if lost in dreams, when Antoine held out his hand to him.

"Is the cemetery far?" Antoine asked Gise.

"Our vault is at Levallois," she said in a low voice. "I've arranged for carriages."

The little procession slowly crossed the courtyard.

A hearse drawn by a pair of horses was standing at the gate; neighbours and some children had lined up in two rows across the sidewalk. Superimposed on the roof of the antiquated vehicle, like a howdah on an elephant's back, was a small coupé for the principal mourners. A ladder clamped to the side led up to it. There was sitting-room for three only, and these three places were reserved for Gise, M. Chasle, and the man in charge of the funeral arrangements. The last-named, however, waived his privilege in Antoine's favour and climbed into the seat beside the driver. The hearse moved off at walking pace, creaking and rumbling on the rough cobbles. The two priests followed in a mourning coach.

The effort of scrambling up the ladder to his place had irritated Antoine's lungs. No sooner was he seated than a fit of coughing came over him; for some moments he remained doubled up, his handker, chief pressed to his lips.

Gise was sitting between the two men. When Antoine's coughing fit had passed, she touched his arm. "It was nice of you to come. I didn't dare to expect it."

"Ah, but one has to be prepared for anything these days!" sighed M. Chasle sententiously. He had perked his head forward to watch Antoine coughing and was still eyeing him over his glasses. "Excuse me," he added, wagging his head, "if I didn't recognize you at once just now. But you're not looking yourself, if I may say so. Don't you agree, Mile. Gise?"

The remark produced a disagreeable impression on Antoine, but he put a good face on it. "Yes, that's so. I've lost quite a lot of weight. The effects of yperite, you know."

Gise turned abruptly, startled by the sepulchral voice. A while ago, in the courtyard, she had been somewhat perturbed by Antoine's general appearance, but had not given it close attention. After all, it was not surprising that he should seem considerably changed after five years' absence, especially as she was seeing him in uniform for the first time. Now, however, it crossed her mind that he might be more seriously ill than she had imagined. She knew he had been gassed but had heard no details. All he had told her was that he was under treatment on the Riviera and "on the road to recovery."

"Yperite—just so!" M. Chasle echoed with an air of pleased omniscience. "Ypres gas, that is. Or mustard gas, some people call it. One of these modern discoveries." He was still gazing at Antoine with rapt attention. "It's thinned you out a bit, the gas. But I see it brought you the Croix de Guerre. With two bars, if my eyes do not deceive me. A glorious award."

Gise glanced at Antoine's coat. He had not written a word about these decorations in his letters.

"What do the doctors say?" Gise ventured to ask. "Do they think you'll have to stay much longer in the hospital?"

"Well, my progress isn't exactly rapid," Antoine admitted with a forlorn smile. He wanted to add something, took a deep breath, but gave it up. The horses had broken into a trot, and the jolts made breathing difficult.

"At our Inventors' Mart," M. Chasle put in, with a would-be engaging grin, "you can buy everything that's needed, including gas masks, needless to say."

Gise turned to the old man and inquired amiably: "How's your business doing? Well, I hope."

"Not too badly, not too badly. Like everybody else these days, we're carrying on. One's got to keep up with the times, eh? All our best inventors have been, snapped up for the front, of course, and it's no good expecting any useful work from them while they're there. Now and then one of them has an inspiration, though. The thing we've just launched for instance. A bomb-proof crown-and-anchor board. Fits into the pocket. Just the thing for the trenches… . Yes, one's got to keep up with the times, Mile. Gise."

Antoine smiled to himself: You, anyhow, haven't changed.

The hearse had entered the spacious boulevards that follow the line of the old Paris fortifications. There was a foretaste of summer in the bright, sunny air. Soldiers in uniform were sauntering on the grassy ramparts, and at the Porte Dauphine Parisiennes in summery frocks, with children or dogs in tow, were making their way toward the Bois. Along the sidewalks pedlars' pushcarts were drawn up, piled high with flowers. Just as in the past.

"What exactly did—did Mademoiselle—die of?" Antoine brought out the words with difficulty across the jolting of the vehicle.

Gise turned to him, all eagerness to explain. "What did she die of, poor Auntie? Nothing in particular. The works had run down, as they say. Heart, kidneys, stomach, everything. She'd been unable to digest any food for weeks. Then, on the last night, her heart failed suddenly." She fell silent for a while. Then, "You can't imagine," she continued, "how her character had changed since she'd entered the home. She thought of nothing but herself, her diet, her comfort, her savings—and she bullied the servants and the nuns. Would you ever have believed it of her! She grumbled at everything, thought she was being persecuted. She even accused the old woman in the next room of stealing her things; there was a dreadful to-do about it. Whole days would go by and she wouldn't drink anything; she'd got it into her head that the sisters were trying to poison her."

Again she paused. She could not understand Antoine's silence, and took it for a veiled reproach; for during the past few days Gise had been plaguing herself with scruples, wondering if she had done all she should have done for her aunt. "After all," she had told herself, "I owe everything to Auntie—she brought me up; and then, the moment I was able to turn my back on her, I did so! And I hardly ever went to visit her at the home."

She began speaking again, raising her voice a little, as if pleading her cause against an accusation. "You know, our hospital work at Maisons keeps us busy all the time. It was awfully hard for me to get an afternoon off to go and see her. These last months were the worst; I let a long time go by without visiting her. Then the Mother Superior wrote a letter, and I went at once. I'll never forget it, never! I found poor Auntie in the little dressing-room, where she kept her clothes; she was sitting on a trunk, in her chemise and petticoat, one stocking on and one leg bare. She was like a skeleton already; her cheeks had fallen in, and her neck was just skin and bones. But the amazing thing was that her legs had somehow kept quite young, like the legs of a little girl. She didn't ask me any news about myself or anyone else, but at once began complaining about her neighbours and the sisters. Then she went up to that old desk of hers—do you remember it?—and opened a drawer where she kept her savings. 'That's to pay for my keep,' she said. Then she began talking about her funeral. 'You'll never see me again. I shall be dead when you come next.' Then she said: 'But you needn't fret, my dear; I'll tell the Mother Superior to send you your Christmas present, just the same.' I tried to turn it off. 'You've been saying for years, Auntie,' I told her, 'that you were going to die.' She got quite angry. 'I tell you, I want to die! Living makes me so dreadfully tired.' All of a sudden she looked at her bare leg. 'Isn't that a pretty foot, now? You're different, you've always had such ugly feet, like a boy's.' When I was leaving, I tried to kiss her but she wouldn't let me. 'No, don't kiss me. I smell horrid; I smell *old*!' It was then she mentioned you. As I was going out, she called me back. 'Do you know, I've lost six teeth! I pulled them out—plop!—like radishes.'

And she started laughing quite cheerfully—you remember that tinkly little laugh she had? 'Six teeth,' she said. 'Mind you let Antoine know. And tell him to hurry up, if he wants to see me again alive.' "

Antoine listened, not without emotion. Stories of illnesses and death had come to interest him. Gise's chatter, moreover, relieved him of the necessity for talking.

"Was that your last visit?"

"No. I went there again ten days ago. They'd written to tell me the priest had given her the sacrament. The room was in darkness; she couldn't bear light any more. Sister Marthe led me to the bed. My aunt lay curled up under the counterpane, looking tinier than ever. The sister tried to rouse her. 'Here's your little niece come to see you.' At last there was a movement on the bed. I don't know if she understood, or if she recognized me. But she said quite clearly: 'It's a long, long business!' Then: 'What's the latest news about the war?' I spoke to her, but she didn't answer, didn't seem to understand. She broke in several times while I was speaking. 'Well? What's the news?' When I wanted to kiss her forehead, she pushed me away. 'No, my dear, I won't have my hair ruffled.' Poor Auntie! That's the last thing I heard her say: 'I won't have my hair ruffled.' "

M. Chasle dabbed his eyes with his handkerchief. Then, after carefully refolding it along the creases, he muttered, in a disapproving tone: "That's so. It wouldn't have done, it wouldn't have done at all to ruffle her hair."

Gise looked down quickly, a young, mischievous, if quite involuntary, smile flickering on her lips. Antoine had a glimpse of it, and suddenly Gise seemed much nearer to him, and he caught himself wanting to tease her, to call her "Blackie" as in the past.

The hearse pulled up at the Porte Champerret for the formalities. On the square were anti-aircraft guns in position, a motorized machine-gun unit, and searchlights, wrapped in camouflaged tarpaulins, guarded by sentries.

After a short wait the hearse moved on again. While they were passing through the crowded streets of the Levallois suburb, M. Chasle heaved a sigh. "Yes, you may say what you like, but poor dear Mademoiselle had a happy life at the Superannuates' Home. That's what I'm looking for, M. Antoine, a home like that for men, but nicely appointed, as they say. There, anyhow, one would have some peace, one wouldn't have to worry about what's happening." He took off his glasses and wiped them. His eyes, seen thus without the glasses, had a gentle, tremulous, rather pathetic expression. "I'd make over to them the pension your late esteemed father left me," he continued, "and I'd feel sheltered … for my last years. I'd be able to sleep late of mornings, and think about myself a bit. I visited a men's home at Lagny, but it's too far east of Paris for these times. One can never take too much care, with those Boches about, can one? I had a look at their cellars; they weren't what I'd call *proper* cellars. Much too flimsy for these times." Each time he said "these times," a nervous tremor shook his voice and he gestured, as if to ward off an evil portent, with his black-gloved hands. They were suede gloves, shabby and much too long for him, with the finger-ends crinkling and curled into unsightly twists like winkle-shells.

Antoine and Gise kept silent. They no longer felt any inclination to smile.

"Everything's so unsettled," the old fellow went on plaintively. "One's never easy in one's mind nowadays. The only time one feels really safe is on air-raid nights, when one's got a *real* cellar to go down to. The one I use, in the house opposite mine—No. 19—now that's what I call a *real* cellar." He waited for a coughing fit which had come over Antoine to subside, then added: "Those nights in the cellar—well, in these times, they're about the best thing one has."

The horses had dropped into a walk; a high wall flanking the roadway came into view.

"This must be it," Gise said.

"Where are you going afterward?" Antoine asked; he was buttressing his shoulders against the back of the seat with all his might to counteract the jolts of the ramshackle old vehicle which gave him constant twinges in the side.

"I'm going to the Rue de l'Université; to your place. I've been sleeping there the last two nights. The hearse is bringing me back; it's included in the undertaker's fee."

"I think we'll try and find a comfortable taxi instead," said Antoine, smiling. Ever since taking his place in the howdahlike contraption on the roof, he had been suffering as much from apprehensions of the moment when he would have to climb down from it as from its immediate discomfort. And he had made up his mind to use another conveyance for the return journey.

Gise shot him a puzzled glance, but made no comment. In any case, the hearse had reached the cemetery-gates and was just turning in.

# Chapter III

"THEY'VE all taken nicely. You'll let them stay ten minutes, won't you?"

"Twenty, if you like."

With eight cupping-glasses stuck on his bare back, Antoine was sitting astride a chair in his little study.

"Just a moment," Gise said. "I mustn't let you catch cold."

She had dropped her nurse's cape over the back of a chair. Now she went and fetched it, and wrapped it round Antoine's shoulders.

He thought: How kind she is, and gentle! And he was greatly moved by the discovery that the old affection still glowed warm as ever in his heart. Why have I kept her at arm's length all these years? Why didn't I write to her? And suddenly the hideous pink bedroom at Le Mousquier came back to his mind; the six chorus girls high-kicking above the mirror, the dreary meals, Joseph's clumsy, if well-meaning, attentions. How pleasant it would be to stay here with Gise to look after him!

"I'll leave the door open," she said, "so you can call me if you want anything. Now I'm off to the kitchen. Messtime!"

" 'Messtime'!" he groaned. "You might have spared me that, Gise. After these last four years, I hate the very sound of the word!"

Laughing, she ran out of the room.

Left to himself, he gave his mind up to the pleasure of home life regained, to his dream of a gentle, affectionate companion nursing him back to health.

And now again he grew conscious of the smell. He had noticed it first on entering, as he crossed the hall and automatically hung his képi on the hat-peg left of the door, where he always hung his hat in former days. He sniffed it eagerly; it seemed as if he could never glut his nostrils with that characteristic odour of his home, forgotten, but so quickly recognized—a vague aroma that emanated from the carpets, curtains, books, upholstery, and subtly permeated all the air in the apartment; a curious, indefinable blend of diverse smells: of cloth and furniture-polish, of leather, tobacco-smoke, and chemicals.

The journey back from the cemetery (with a detour to the Gare de Lyon to pick up his valise at the parcel-room) had seemed interminable. The pain in his side had grown worse and the oppression on his chest redoubled. In fact, on alighting from the taxi at his door, he had felt so ill that he had damned himself for a fool to have risked this trip to Paris. Luckily he had with him all the necessary equipment, and had promptly given himself an injection of oxygen that had reduced the dyspncea. Then under his instructions Gise had applied cupping-glasses; they were beginning to take effect, and already his lungs were becoming less congested and it was easier to breathe.

Stooping forward, unmoving, his back taut and his lean arms crossed on the back of the chair, he contemplated his surroundings with an almost sentimental eye. He had never imagined he would be so much moved by the sight of his old home, his study. Nothing had changed. Gise had promptly whisked the slip-covers off the furniture, put the chairs in their usual places, opened the shutters, and let the blind down half-way. Nothing had changed, yet everything seemed oddly unexpected. This little "den" of his, in which he had used to spend so much of his time, was at once familiar and strange, like those memories of childhood which flash up in our minds with a breath-taking vividness and precision after being lost in complete oblivion for many years. In mild amazement his eyes roved the deep-piled brown carpet, the leather armchairs, the sofa and its cushions, the fireplace and its clock, the wall-lamps and bookshelves. "Is it possible I once devoted so much time and thought to the furnishing of this room?" he murmured incredulously. He could name the exact title of each of those books—to which assuredly he had not given a thought during the past four years—as promptly as if he had been handling it yesterday. Each article of furniture, every object—that small round table, that tortoise-shell paperknife, the brass ashtray with the dragon stamped on it, the cigarette-box—evoked some definite association, some incident of his life: the time and place of buying it, the gratitude of a patient each phase of whose illness he could still recall, one of Anne's gestures, a remark of the Caliph's, a memory of his father. For the little study had once been M. Thibault's dressing-room. He had only to shut his eyes to see again the big mahogany wash-stand, the mirror-wardrobe, the copper footbath, the bootjack that used to stand in the corner. Almost, indeed, it would have caused him less surprise to have found this room exactly as he had known it in his childhood than as he saw it now—as he himself had refashioned it.

"Odd!" he murmured. "I had the same feeling just now when I was at the front door—of entering not my own place, but Father's!"

He opened his eyes again, and his gaze lit on the telephone placed upon a low table by the sofa. And, in a flash, memory had cast across the screen a picture of the hale, vigorous young man who had so often used that telephone, a man proud of his never-flagging energy, authoritative, rejoicing in his strength. Between that young man and his present self lay four years of war, four years of sombre musings and revolt, ending with these last black months of physical pain and breakdown, the premature decrepitude which forced itself upon his notice at every turn. A rush of disheartenment came over him; he buried his face in his arms. He saw the past now bathed in roseate light, the glamour of youth and health. Ah, what would he not have given to retrieve the atmosphere of that bygone family life, that lost serenity! His father, Jacques, Mademoiselle—all were gone; and regret for the days that were no more made today's lot seem drearier still. He was on the brink of calling Gise to help him escape from himself… . With an effort he pulled himself together. Yes, he must face the facts. Really, it was all a question of health. The first thing was to get well again. He resolved, at the earliest opportunity, to have a serious consultation with his old teacher Dr. Philip and with his aid draw up plans for a more rapid and drastic treatment. In the long run, the treatment he was following at Le Mousquier was probably debilitating; it was abnormal that he should have lost so much strength. Philip would put him in the way of regaining it. Philip … Gise. Why not bring Gise back with him to Le Mousquier? Yes, then he would … get well … be fit again… . Suddenly his eyes closed, he fell asleep.

When he awoke a few minutes later, Gise, perched on the arm of an easy-chair, was gazing at him. Her brows were knitted with the intensity of her gaze and there was a shade of anxiety in it. She had never been able to control her face so as to hide her thoughts, and Antoine read them now quite easily.

"I look like a wreck, eh?"

"No, but thinner."

"Yes, I've lost nineteen pounds since last autumn."

"Feeling easier in your chest, I hope?"

"Much easier, thanks."

"Your voice is still a bit … husky." (Of the change that had come over Antoine, what had impressed her most was the extreme weakness of his voice and its hoarseness.)

"Just now it's nothing. There are times, especially mornings, when I lose my voice altogether."

There was a short silence; then she slipped off the chair onto her feet, saying: "I'll take them off now, if you like."

"Right you are."

Drawing up a chair, she sat down behind him and, slipping her hands under the cape so that he should not catch a chill, began detaching the cupping-glasses from his back with infinite precautions, placing each, as it came off, in her lap. Then, gathering up the corners of her apron, she carried them away to the kitchen, to rinse them out.

Antoine stood up. He noticed that he was breathing much more freely. After scrutinizing in the glass his lean back mottled with violet rings, he dressed again.

Gise had just finished laying the table when he entered the dining-room. His eyes roved its uncompanionable vastness, the twenty chairs aligned along the wall, the marble-topped sideboard at which Léon had officiated in bygone days. Then he said: "When the war's over, Gise, I'm going to sell this place."

She turned and stared at him amazedly, forgetting to put down the plate she had in her hand. "What? Sell the house?"

"Yes, and I don't want to keep anything that's here. Not a thing. I'll take a small apartment, something simple, easy to run. I'll …" He paused, smiling at himself. He had no very clear idea of what he meant to do, but of one thing he was sure. That morning he had changed his plans for good and all; nothing would induce him to resume his pre-war life.

"Here's the menu! Veal cutlets with macaroni and butter sauce, and strawberries. That do you all right?" she asked, giving up trying to understand why Antoine should have taken this sudden aversion to a home arranged meticulously to his liking. (In any case, she had little imagination and rarely took much interest in future plans.)

"You're a dear, giving yourself all this trouble!" he exclaimed as his eyes fell on the trimly laid table.

"You'll have to give me another ten minutes… . Oh, and I couldn't find the napkins."

"I'll hunt for them."

A folding-bed occupied most of the narrow space in the linen-room. It had been slept in, and he saw a little bunch of rosaries curled on the unmade sheets. Some garments lay on a chair.

"Now why didn't she use the bedroom at the end of the hall?" he wondered.

He opened a closet, a second and a third one. All were filled with brand-new linen: sheets, pillowcases, bathrobes, aprons, and dust-cloths tied up in dozens with the price-tickets still on them. "Absurd having all that stuff! I'll have it auctioned off, except what's indispensable." He drew toward him a bundle of napkins and took out two of them. Of a sudden he thought: "I've got it! She didn't want to sleep in Jacques's old room, that's why she put the bed in here."

He sauntered back along the passage, running his fingers over the paintwork of the walls, turning the handles of the doors he passed, and peeping into rooms, as if he were on a tour of inspection in a stranger's apartment.

Back in the hall, he paused for a moment outside the double doors of his consulting-room. He felt a curious reluctance about entering it. At last he turned the handle and went in. The Venetian blinds were down. The furniture, swathed in slip-covers, had been pushed back against the bookshelves, and the room seemed larger than ever. Filtering between the slats of the blinds, the sunlight filled the room with a discreet radiance like that prevailing in big provincial drawing-rooms unused save on at-home days.

Suddenly he recalled those last weeks of July 1914, the newspapers Studler used to bring back by the dozen, their arguments, the nerve-wracking suspense. And his brother's visits. Wasn't it here that Jacques had come, with Jenny, on the very day that mobilization was announced?

His back against the doorjamb, leaning forward a little, he lightly sniffed the air, as if to test its savour. Yes, that characteristic scent was here—but somehow fresher, more pungent than elsewhere, and a little different too, more aromatic. The big writing-desk, sheeted and forlorn in the middle of the room, had the look of a child's catafalque.

What on earth can they have stowed away under that sheet? he wondered and, stepping forward, drew it aside.

The desk was stacked with a miscellaneous assortment of envelopes and packages that had come through the mail. From the beginning of the war the concierge had made a habit of placing on it all the printed matter addressed to Antoine: prospectuses, newspapers, samples sent by manufacturing pharmacists. "Now, what's that *smell*?" he asked himself again. For with the familiar odour of the room there mingled here a tang of some unusual, strongly aromatic perfume.

Mechanically, he slipped the wrapper off a medical journal and ran his eyes through the contents. Then abruptly, out of the blue, a thought flashed into his mind—of Rachel. "That's odd," he mused. "Why should I think of Rachel here, instead of Anne?" Rachel had never crossed the threshold of this house, and for ages he had not given a thought to her existence. "What can have become of her? I wonder where she is now. Somewhere in the tropics, most likely, with that fellow Hirsch, thousands of miles from Europe and the war." He picked out some medical journals to take with him to Le Mousquier, glanced at the tables of contents, and tossed them onto the mantelpiece. "The only doctors contributing to these journals nowadays are the old fogies, the ones who've stayed behind. This war's been a godsend for them. They've been able to place all the old manuscripts mouldering in their drawers." Now and then, however, he noticed, a younger man found time to contribute a brief report of some unusual case. "Surgery has made enormous strides; that's the one good thing this war has done." He continued rummaging in the heap of periodicals, now and again tossing one of them onto the mantelpiece. "If only I could settle down to work on my monograph on infantile affections of the lungs! Sébillon would certainly take it for his review."

A package covered with gaudy foreign postage stamps caught his eye. He picked it up, then promptly lifted it to his nose, his curiosity whetted once again by the odd, aromatic smell he had noticed on entering the room. Still sniffing, he examined the name of the sender, noted on a corner of the wrapper: "Mile. Bonnet, General Hospital, Konakri, French Guinea." The stamps were postmarked March 1915. Three years old. Greatly puzzled, he turned the little package over and over in his hand. What could it be? A medicine? A perfume? Cutting the string, he stripped off the wrappings. Inside was a redwood box, nailed down on all sides. "A bit

of a job opening it," he murmured, and glanced round the room for something he could use to pry the lid off. Nothing suitable presenting itself, he was of half a mind to leave his curiosity ungratified when suddenly he remembered he had his army knife in his pocket. Slipping the blade between two nails, with a slight pressure he had the lid off. A waft of aromatic perfume floated up; it seemed somehow familiar, that blend of incense with some pungent oriental gum, yet he could not identify it. Delicately, with the tip of his nail he stroked aside the layer of sawdust; some small yellowish, egglike objects came into view, dully glowing through a film of dust. And suddenly the past had risen before his eyes, vivid as reality—those were Rachel's beads, her necklace of honey-golden amber set with tiny rings of ambergris between the beads. He lifted it from the box and carefully wiped off the dust. His eyes grew misted as memory lit up facets of the past. The smooth whiteness of her breast, a glimmer of red-gold hair. And then—Le Havre, their parting, the *Romania* putting out to sea at daybreak. But why had she sent the necklace? Who was this Mile. Bonnet? What was the meaning of it all?

Hearing footsteps in the passage, he quickly slipped the necklace into his pocket.

Gise had come to summon him to lunch. On the threshold she paused and sniffed. "What a funny smell!"

He drew the slip-cover back over the papers and packages littering the desk.

"They've used it to store the patent medicines that came in while I was away."

"Lunch is ready. Are you coming?"

He followed her out of the room. His right hand was thrust into his pocket and, as he felt the beads growing warm against his palm, a picture hovered before him of lithe white limbs, a glimmer of ruddy gold.

# Chapter IV

ONCE they were seated side by side at an end of the big table, Gise turned to Antoine with a resolute air. “Now I want you to tell me all about your health, exactly how you stand.”

Antoine made a grimace. Actually he was more than willing to talk about himself, his illness and its treatment; but it gave him a certain pleasure to be coaxed, and he parried her first questions with a show of reluctance. He soon became aware that these questions were far from being inept. His little Gise, it seemed, whom he had always been inclined to treat as a mere child, had turned her three years’ hospital experience to good account. He could now talk shop with her, in fact. Another link beween them. The interest she displayed encouraged him to give an outline of his illness, with a detailed description of its various phases during the past few months. Had she shown any tendency to treat his diagnosis lightly or turn it aside with vaguely comforting remarks, he would have purposely exaggerated his apprehensions. But as she listened her expression was so earnest, there was such deep and anxious interest in her gaze, that he took the opposite course and wound up on an optimistic note.

“All things considered, then, I shall pull through.” (Of this, indeed, deep within him, he was convinced.) “It may take some time,” he added with a confident smile, “but there can be no doubt I shall recover. The only thing that worries me is whether my recovery will be *complete*. Suppose my larynx remains impaired, or my vocal cords don’t get back their strength, will I be able to take up my practice again? I can’t be satisfied, you know, with the mere prospect of a reasonably long life. I’ve no use for a life in which I’m only the shadow of my former self. I want to feel assured I’ll get back the physical fitness I had before the war. And that’s another story.”

She had stopped eating so as to give her whole attention to what he said, and the big, candid, wondering eyes intent on him glowed with a childlike devotion that brought to mind the gaze of certain unspoilt savage races. And this affectionate concern of hers, after so many years’ privation, was doubly sweet to him. He gave a short, confident laugh. “Less sure, I grant, but not impossible. Very few things are impossible, if one refuses to be beaten. So far, I’ve always carried out everything I really set my mind on. Why shouldn’t I do so now? I’m determined to get well; I *shall* get well.”

He had forced his voice for the last remark; a prolonged and violent fit of coughing prevented him from continuing. Bending over her plate, Gise watched him furtively, trying to reassure herself. After all, she reflected, what Antoine wants he always gets, and he’ll manage to cure himself—somehow.

When the coughing fit had passed, she turned toward him. He made a gesture to indicate that he would rather not speak again for a while.

“Drink some water,” she said, filling his glass. Then, unable to repress the question which was hovering on her lips, she asked: “How many days will you be staying here?”

He made no reply. It was a topic he would have preferred to shun. Actually, he had been given four days’ leave. But he proposed to abridge it; the prospect of remaining three more days in Paris, unable to continue his regular treatment and with the constant risk of overtiring himself, did not appeal to him.

“How long?” she insisted. “A week? Five or six days?”

He shook his head, took a deep breath, then smiled. “I’m going back tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!” Her tone betrayed her disappointment. “Then you won’t come to see us at Maisons-Laffitte?”

“Can’t be done, my dear, I’m afraid. Not this trip, anyhow. Later on, perhaps, in the summer.”

“But I’ll hardly have time to see anything of you. What a shame—after all those years! And I can’t even stay with you overnight in Paris, because I must get back to Maisons this evening. I have to be on duty first thing tomorrow morning. It’s three days, you see, since I left the hospital, and six new patients came in just before I left.”

“Anyhow, we’ve the whole afternoon before us,” Antoine pointed out consolingly.

“But I’m not free this afternoon!” she cried in despair. “I have to go back to the home at three. They want Auntie’s room at once, and I’ve got to see about getting her things moved out of it.”

Her eyes were swimming with tears. Antoine remembered the moods of black despair that used to come over her in her childhood days. And again the fancy crossed his mind—how good it would be to have her always at his side, lavishing on him the warm devotion that came so naturally to her.

He felt at a loss what to. say; for he, too, was distressed by the thought that they would see so little of each other. “I might be able to get an extension of my leave,” he murmured with affected dubiety. “It’s just possible. Perhaps I’ll have a shot at it.” Her eyes lit up at once, smiling through tears. (This, too, reminded Antoine of bygone days.) “Yes, yes!” she cried, clapping her hands. “That’s what you must do; then you can come and stay a few days with us at Maisons.”

He thought: What a child she still is! And what a charming effect it has—such childishness of mind in a grownup woman’s body!

To give a new turn to the conversation, he asked, as if the thought were puzzling him: “By the way, there’s something I want you to explain. How is it that no one came with you to Paris? Maisons isn’t so very far away. What an idea, letting you come in alone for the funeral!”

This elicited a vigorous protest from Gise. “But you’ve no idea of the work we have at Maisons! There’s never a moment to spare. And with me away, of course, the others had all the more to do.”

He could not help smiling at her indignant air, and, noticing his smile, she launched out into an elaborate account of all they had to do at the hospital, the thousand and one details of their daily life.

From mid-September 1914, Mme. de Fontanin, obsessed by the desire to “make herself useful,” had begun working up a scheme for a war hospital at Maisons-Laffitte. The English couple to whom she had rented the house there which she had inherited from her father had left France on the outbreak of the war. Thus her little country place was free. But it was too small and also too far from the station to serve her purpose. She decided then to appeal to Antoine and ask him to lend his father’s house at Maisons, much larger than hers and within easy reach of the town. Naturally Antoine had agreed, and he had at once written to Gise, telling her to give Mme. de Fontanin all the assistance she could in arranging the house for its new functions, and to bring the two maids to help.

Meanwhile Mme. de Fontanin had enlisted the aid of Nicole Héquet, the surgeon's wife, who had a graduate nurse's diploma. Under the auspices of the National War Casualties Council, a board of governors had been nominated, and six weeks later the Thibault country house had been fully equipped and, under the official title of War Hospital No. 7, was ready to receive its first batch of wounded soldiers. Since then, War Hospital No. 7 and those in charge of it—Mme. de Fontanin and Nicole—had not known an idle day.

Antoine had been kept informed of all that was being done and it had given him pleasure to learn that his father's house was serving so useful a purpose. What pleased him even more was that the Fontanins had taken Gise so warmly to their bosom, for he had felt anxious on her account when he learned that she was staying on in Paris without a settled occupation. But, to tell the truth, he had felt no great interest in the activities of War Hospital No. 7 and still less in the reorganization of the Fontanins' small country house, which, under the capable management of his ex-cook Clotilde, had become a sort of hostel for the younger generation. Here Gise and Nicole lodged; here Daniel had landed after his operation; here, too, since her return from Switzerland Jenny had been living, with her child. Antoine found his curiosity aroused by Gise's enthusiastic account of their life at Maisons, and this little group of people, to whom he had rarely given a thought, began to take living form before his eyes.

"Among us all," Gise was saying, still full of her subject, "it's Jenny who has the hardest time of it. She has not only to look after little Paul, but to superintend the laundry, and you can imagine what that means for a hospital with thirty-eight beds—sometimes we have extras, bringing it up to forty-five; she has to supervise the washing, ironing, mending of the linen, sort it out and issue it every day, not to mention the records she keeps up. She's all worn out when she comes back at night. She works at the hospital all afternoon but stays at home in the morning to attend to the baby. Mme. de Fontanin lives at the hospital, in one of the rooms above the stables."

It struck Antoine as rather odd to hear Gise, the niece of pious and prudish old Mademoiselle, talking thus of Jenny's motherhood, as of something quite legitimate and usual. But then he reflected: "Three years have passed; it's ancient history. And, anyhow, such a change has come over moral standards since the war that things which would have shocked people formerly are more or less accepted nowadays."

"Just think!" Gise sounded quite indignant. "You were going to leave Paris without even having a look at our baby! Jenny'd have been heart-broken."

"Don't be silly!" Antoine laughed. "All you had to do was not to tell her I'd been to Paris."

"No." An unwonted seriousness came into her voice, and she lowered her eyes. "I don't want to have any secrets from Jenny … ever!"

He gazed at her wonderingly, but made no comment.

"Anyhow, can you be certain," she went on, "of getting an extension of your leave?"

"I'll have a try."

"How?"

He lied again. "I'll get Rumelles to call up the military authorities, who decide these matters."

"Ah, Rumelles …" she murmured pensively.

"In any case, I was meaning to look him up today. I haven't seen him since … I want to thank him for all the trouble he took on our account."

This was the first time since they had met that day that either had alluded to Jacques's death.

Gise's face began to twitch and patches of a still darker hue mottled the dusky cheeks.

(Throughout the autumn of 1914 she had refused to believe that Jacques was dead. For her his continued silence, the news of his disappearance communicated by his friends in Switzerland, Jenny's certitude of his death and Antoine's similar belief, carried no weight whatever. She told herself: he has seized the pretext given him by the war for disappearing once again, and once again he will come back to us. And nightly she prayed God for his return, confident that some day her prayers would be answered. It was during this period that she had deliberately set about winning Jenny's affection. There was no denying that at the outset this was prompted by a rather selfish motive. When Jacques comes back, she told herself, he'll find us friends, and I'll be given a place in their life. And perhaps he'll be grateful to me for being nice to her during his absence. Ultimately, however, news had come through Rumelles of the aeroplane disaster and, after reading a copy of the official report, she had been forced to recognize the truth. And yet, deep down in her heart, she always nursed a vague, unreasoning surmise that somewhere, somehow, there had been a mistake, and often in a sudden uprush of hope would murmur: "Who knows …?")

She was looking down again, to avoid meeting Antoine's gaze; an intolerable spasm of remembrance had gripped her and for a few moments she remained unmoving, dazed with grief, struggling to keep back her tears. At last, on the verge of breaking down, she jumped up and ran out of the room.

A little vexed by this distress, of which involuntarily he had been the cause, Antoine watched her receding form. It struck him that Gise had put on considerable weight, especially about the hips. In fact, her figure made her look quite ten years older: one could easily have taken her for a woman in the thirties.

He had drawn the necklace from his pocket. Little balls of leaden-hued ambergris, the size of cherry-stones, alternated with big amber beads which had the shape of mirabelle plums and the hue of them when overripe; a cloudy yellow, here and there translucent. As he idly fingered them, the beads grew warm and fragrant, and for a rapturous moment Antoine had the illusion that he had just removed the necklace from Rachel's neck.

When Gise came back with a basket of strawberries and placed them on the table, her expression was still so woebegone that Antoine, deeply moved, fondled in silence the soft brown wrist, encircled by a silver bangle. A slight shudder passed through her body; her eyelashes quivered. She would not meet his gaze and, as she seated herself beside him, he saw the tears welling up again in her eyes. And now, no longer trying to conceal her grief, she turned to Antoine with a tremulous smile and gazed at him for some moments without speaking.

Then, "It's silly of me!" she murmured with a little sigh, and fell to sugaring her strawberries. But almost at once she put down the sugar-bowl and straightened herself up with a nervous little jerk. "Do you know what hurts me most, Antoine? It's that not one of all the people round me ever mention his name. I know that Jenny's always thinking of him; it's because he's Jacques's son that she dotes on her baby as she does. And Jacques is always there between us, in a way; if I'm so fond of her, it's because of him, my memories of

him. And it's the same with her, most likely. If she was so ready to make a bosom friend of me, to treat me like a sister, it's surely on his account. But never, never does she speak to me of Jacques. It's like a secret that's always at the back of our minds and links our lives together—but never do we breathe a word about it. And, Antoine, it makes me feel—I don't know how to put it!—stifled. Jenny, you see"—the words came with a sort of sob—"she's so proud, she doesn't make things easy. I've come to know her really well. I'm awfully fond of her, I'd give my life for her and for little Paul. But I can't help suffering—horribly! Because she is—what she is; so stand-offish, so … I don't know what the word is. Do you know, I think there's something always preying on her mind, the idea that nobody ever understood Jacques except her. And she clings to that idea—that she was the one person who understood him—with a sort of jealous spite, and that's why she won't talk about him with others. Especially with me. And yet, and yet …"

Big tears were rolling down her cheeks, though now her face, from which all youth was gone, betrayed no longer grief but only passion, anger, and some other more primitive emotion that Antoine could make little of. He tried to fit things together, for this news of Gise's intimacy with Jenny had come wholly as a surprise.

"I've never been sure whether she knew about my—my feelings for Jacques." Her voice still shook, but it had lost its shrillness. "Oh, how I'd love to talk to her about it, open my heart to her! I've nothing to conceal; I'd much rather she knew everything. Even that I used to hate her—once; yes, hate her bitterly. But that's all over; since Jacques's death the love I had for him"—her eyes lit up with fanatic devotion—"is all for her now, and for their child."

For some moments Antoine had scarcely troubled to listen to her words, all his attention held by the fluttering brown eyelids, the long lashes slowly rising and falling, veiling and discovering, with the regularity of a revolving light, the darkly glowing pupils. His cheek propped on his hand, he was resting his elbow on the table, stirred with faint longings by the perfume of the necklace clinging to his fingers.

"I'm all alone in the world now, except for them." Gise was trying her best to speak more calmly. "Jenny's promised to keep me with her, always."

He wondered: Would she come and live with me, if I proposed it?

"Yes, she's promised it. And that's what helps me to keep going, to face the future. You understand, don't you? There's nothing in the world I care for any longer, except to be with her—and with our little one."

No, he told himself, she wouldn't come to me. Still, he had been struck by certain jarring undertones in her voice which seemed to him revelatory. What curious cross-currents of emotion, he reflected, must pervade the friendship that's sprung up between these two women—these two *widows!* Affection's there undoubtedly. But jealousy as well. And behind it all a rankling hatred, I should say. In fact, a mixture of emotions that's uncommonly like love!

Gise went on talking; it was a wonderful solace thus to unburden herself, and she could not have enough of it. "You know Jenny's a wonderful person, one in a thousand. So noble-minded, so energetic. Yes, she's wonderful. But awfully hard on others. She's worse than hard; she's positively unjust to poor Daniel. And to me, too—I can't help feeling it, sometimes. Oh, I know she has a perfect right to be like that; I'm so futile compared with her. And yet—she makes mistakes, too. She's so sure of herself, it blinds her and she won't hear of other people having different ideas. Still, what I ask isn't anything so out of the way. If she won't let little Paul be brought up in his father's faith, that's her affair, it's no use my trying to go against her. But at least she might let him be baptized by a Protestant minister, don't you agree?" An obstinate expression had settled on her face, and the way she tossed her head in petulant little jerks while her lips set in a hard, peremptory line reminded Antoine of Mademoiselle, on the rare occasions when she put her foot down. "Yes," she cried, swinging brusquely round on Antoine, "she can make a little Protestant of him, if she wants! But at least she shouldn't bring up Jacques's son like a heathen."

Antoine made an evasive gesture.

"You don't know the baby," she said hastily. "He's such a highly strung, impulsive little fellow, he'll *need* religion when he grows up." She sighed, and a note of poignant regret came into her voice. "Like Jacques. Everything'd have been all right if Jacques hadn't lost his faith." Again, with amazing mobility, her expression changed, grew soft, and a rapturous smile dawned in her eyes. "The child's extraordinarily like Jacques, you know. His hair's the same reddish brown. He has Jacques's eyes and hands. And he's terribly self-willed already for a child of three. Sometimes he won't do anything he's told, but he can be awfully sweet when he chooses." Not a trace of rancour remained in her voice. She laughed. "Just think, he calls me Auntie *Gil*"

"Self-willed, you say?"

"Just like Jacques. And he has the same fits of sulkiness—you remember how Jacques was?—a sort of suppressed fury. Then he runs off to a corner of the garden and stays there sulking till the mood passes."

"Is he intelligent?"

"Very. He understands, picks things up at once. But he's terribly sensitive. There's nothing one can't get out of him by gentleness, but if you cross him, or stop him from doing something he's set his heart on, he flares up, clenches his little fists, and scowls at you. Just like

Jacques, again!" She mused for a few moments. "Daniel took a good snapshot of him the other day. Did Jenny send you one?"

"No. Jenny has never sent me any photo of her son."

Gise looked surprise. She gazed at him inquiringly, but refrained from putting the question hovering on her lips. Then, "I have the photo with me, in my bag," she said. "Like to see it?"

"Yes."

She ran out of the room, fetched her bag, and produced two small snapshots. One of them, taken presumably in the previous year, showed little Jean-Paul with his mother. Jenny had filled out a little, her face was fuller, her expression calm, indeed austere. "She'll be like Mme. Fontanin," Antoine said to himself. Jenny was in black, sitting on the steps of her mother's house, with the baby in her arms.

In the other, obviously a more recent photograph, little Paul was by himself. He was wearing a tight-fitting jersey suit that showed to advantage the remarkable sturdiness of the small body. The child stood stiffly erect, with eyes downcast and a sulky look on his face.

Antoine was greatly interested by-the two likenesses. The second, especially, reminded him of Jacques. There were the same deep-set, penetrating eyes, the same mouth, and the same chin—the heavy Thibault under-jaw.

Gise, standing behind Antoine, leaning on his shoulder, explained: “When that was taken, he’d been busy building sand-castles, and somebody had interrupted him. He flew into a temper and threw his shovel away; you can see it lying there”—she pointed. “Then he backed to the wall and Daniel snapped him.”

Antoine looked up with a laugh. “Why, Gise, you love that child as much as if you were his mother!”

She smiled without replying, but in her smile there was a world of affection, a radiance that said more than words.

Nevertheless, a vague embarrassment, which Antoine failed to notice, had seized her—as always when a chance remark recalled that absurd, unbelievable thing that she had done—when was it? More than two years ago it must have been, for Paul was then quite tiny, not yet weaned. There was nothing Gise liked better than having him in her arms, rocking him to sleep against her breast. Whenever she saw Jenny suckling the baby, a rush of furious jealousy and despair swept over her, all but shattering her self-control. One day, yielding to a sudden, preposterous temptation, she had taken the baby to her room and pressed his lips to her breast. Her senses tingled as she remembered how the tiny mouth had fastened on her greedily, leaving her bruised and sore. Indeed, for the next few days she had suffered almost as much physically as from a sense of shame. Was it a sin she had committed? It was not until she had made avowal of it—though in veiled terms—in the confessional that she had regained some peace of mind, and on her own initiative she had imposed a lengthy penance on herself for this lapse—which she had never repeated.

Antoine asked: “Is he often like that?-I mean, does he often have that obstinate look?”

“Oh, yes, very often indeed. Still, that time it was Daniel who’d upset him. Though as a matter of fact he’s less disobedient with Daniel than with the rest of us—because he has a man to deal with, most likely. Yet he dotes on his mother, and he’s very fond of me. But we’re only women. And he seems quite conscious already of his—what shall I call it?—masculine superiority. No, I’m not joking, it’s perfectly true. He makes one feel it in a lot of little ways.”

“I’d be more inclined to think your authority doesn’t work so well because you’re always with him. Whereas his uncle, whom he doesn’t see so often …”

“But he does! He’s far more with his uncle than with us, as we’ve our work at the hospital. It’s Daniel who looks after him almost all day.”

“What? Daniel?”

She had been leaning over Antoine’s shoulder; now she moved away a little and sat down. “Yes. Why not? Does it surprise you?”

“Well, somehow I don’t see Daniel in the role of nursemaid… .”

Gise did not understand; she had never met Daniel before he had been amputated.

“I assure you he’s quite happy to have the little boy for company. It’s pretty dull for him at Maisons with nothing to do.”

“But now that he’s been invalided out, hasn’t he started working again?”

“Working? In the hospital, you mean?”

“No. At his painting.”

“His painting? I’ve never seen him with a brush in his hand.”

“Doesn’t he run in to Paris now and then?”

“Never. He spends his time pottering about the house or in the garden.”

“I suppose he has trouble in walking.”

“Oh, no, that’s not it. One doesn’t notice that he’s lame unless one watches him closely. Especially now that he has his new artificial leg. He just doesn’t want to go out. He reads the papers, looks after Paul and plays with him. Sometimes he goes to the kitchen and helps Clotilde shelling peas or peeling fruit for jam. Now and then he gets a rake and hoe and tidies up the terrace. Not often, though. That’s how Daniel is—slack, apathetic; in fact, he seems half asleep most of the time.”

“Daniel!”

“Yes, why not?”

“Well, he usedn’t to be like that at all… . Poor fellow, he must be very unhappy.”

“Unhappy? What an idea! He doesn’t even seem bored; anyhow, he never complains. Sometimes he’s a bit irritable—with the others, never with me; but that’s because they don’t know how to handle him. Nicole’s always fussing round him, teasing him, and it gets on his nerves. Jenny, too, is tactless; she won’t answer him or answers in a chilling way. Of course Jenny’s kindness itself, but she’s no good at showing it; she never seems to say or do anything that makes others happy.”

Antoine said nothing, but his face betrayed such amazement that Gise burst out laughing. “Really, I think you’ve quite a wrong idea of Daniel’s temperament. I should say he’s always been terribly spoilt—and he’s the laziest of men!”

Their meal was long since ended. After glancing at her watch Gise jumped up hastily.

“I’ll clear the table and then I really must be off.”

Standing in front of Antoine, she gazed at him affectionately. The thought of leaving him alone and ill in the depressing atmosphere of the apartment distressed her greatly, and she racked her brain for something to propose. Then a shy smile lit up her eyes, and settled on her lips.

“Listen, supposing I came back and called for you here later on? You could spend the night with us at Maisons instead of staying here all by yourself.”

He shook his head. “Nothing doing for tonight, I’m afraid. I must look up Rumelles this afternoon and I shall see Philip tomorrow. What’s more, I’ve a long job before me, looking for the papers I want to take back with me.” He reflected. There was no necessity for him to be back at Le Mousquier before Friday night, so it was quite feasible to spend a couple of days at Maisons-Laffitte. He asked: “But where’ll you put me up if I come?”

With a little cry of joy she bent forward hastily and kissed him before replying. “Where? Why, at the Hostel, of course. We’ve still two bedrooms free.”

He had kept the photograph of little Paul in his hand, now and again glancing down at it. “All right, I’ll see about getting my leave extended. And I’ll be round tomorrow evening.” He held up the photograph. “I can keep this, can’t I?”

# Chapter V

THOUGH it was a Sunday, Rumelles was in his office when Antoine called him up after Gise had left. He explained that he had not a moment to spare in the afternoon, but suggested that Antoine should pick him up at eight and they should dine together.

When Antoine called at the Foreign Office, Rumelles was waiting for him at the foot of the staircase. The lights were dimmed to blackout exiguity, and the dark forms of employees leaving after the day's work and a few belated visitors arriving, the play of shadows and the silence, combined to create an eerie, conspiratorial atmosphere.

Rumelles greeted Antoine warmly, if with a vaguely patronizing air, and at once led him to the courtyard, where several cars flying the official flag were lined up.

"I'll take you to Maxim's; that'll make a good change after hospital life, won't it?"

"I'm afraid," Antoine smiled, "a cabaret dinner will be rather wasted on me. I'm only allowed milk at night."

"That's all right." (Rumelles had made up his mind to dine at Maxim's.) "They've excellent iced milk there."

Antoine reluctantly assented. The day's exertions—he had spent a strenuous afternoon rummaging among his books and memoranda-had been too much for him, and he rather dreaded the prospect of a loquacious evening. He made haste to warn Rumelles that he found difficulty in speaking, and had to spare his throat as much as possible.

"What luck for me!" laughed Rumelles. "You know how I love talking." Anxious at all costs not to betray how dismayed he was by his friend's sunken cheeks and hollow, toneless voice, he deliberately forced the jovial note. On entering the brightly lighted restaurant, he was even more shocked to see the change that had come over Antoine. But he took care not to put any too pressing questions as to his health and, after some vague inquiries, made haste to change the subject.

"No soup. Yes, some oysters. It's the end of the season but they're still in condition. … I dine here pretty often."

"I used to come here pretty often, too," Antoine murmured. He threw a quick glance round the room; then his gaze came to rest on the old headwaiter, waiting to take their order. "You remember me, Jean, don't you?"

"Remember you, sir? Of course I do." The man bowed with a conventional smile.

Antoine thought: He's lying. He always used to call me "Doctor."

"This place is near my office," Rumelles pointed out. "And when there's an air-raid warning, it's very handy. I've only got to step across the road to the Admiralty building, where they've an excellent shelter."

Antoine watched Rumelles as he selected his dinner. He, too, had changed. His features had grown coarser; the yellow hair, still shaggy as a lion's mane, was streaked with grey, and a network of tiny wrinkles had gathered round his eyes. Under the lower lids bluish pouches had formed, overhanging the pale cheeks, on which a skin affection had left a tracery of scarlet veins. Only the eyes had not aged; they were bright, alert as ever.

At last with a weary gesture he gave back the bill of fare to the *maître d'hôtel*. "I'll choose my dessert later." Letting his head sink back, he pressed his palms to his forehead, his fingers on his aching eyelids, then heaved a deep sigh. "It's appalling, Thibault! I haven't had a day off since the war started—and I'm at the end of my tether."

That was obvious; the cumulative effect of years of constant strain on this high-strung man had taken the form of an extreme restlessness. Yes, Antoine thought, indeed he's changed appallingly from the Rumelles I knew in 1914, the pattern of diplomacy, a bit too cocksure and inclined to lay down the law, but always keeping his tongue well in hand, watching his step! Four years of overwork had made of him a man with vacillating eyes, a short, jerky laugh, who gesticulated, jumped abruptly from one topic to another, and on whose puffy features the expression changed suddenly from feverish alertness to one of utter prostration. Yet he still tried to keep up appearances; after each confession of fatigue, he straightened up for a moment, flung back his head, sleeked his long hair with a sweeping gesture, and conjured up a smile that had much of the old breeziness.

Antoine began by thanking him for taking so much trouble over the investigation into the circumstances of Jacques's death, and for the help he had given Jenny when she went to Switzerland. Rumelles broke in genially: "Don't mention it, old man. It was the least I could do." Then, smiling rather fatuously, he added: "Such an attractive young woman—it was a pleasure, don't you know?"

Too much the man of the world not to play the fool on occasion, was Antoine's silent comment.

Having once cut Antoine short, Rumelles kept the conversation to himself. He launched out into a detailed description of the various steps he had taken, as though the matter were completely new to Antoine. Each fact was amazingly clear in his memory; every date, the names of all who had helped in the investigation, came pat off his lips.

"What a sad end!" he sighed, in concluding. "But you're not drinking your milk, Thibault. It'll get warm… ." He shot a furtive glance at Antoine, brought his wineglass to his lips, wiped his catlike moustache, and sighed again. "Yes, a tragic end. I felt for you most deeply, needless to say. And yet—considering the circumstances … your views … the family honour—one can't half wonder if, for the family, anyhow, his death was not, if I may put it so, a blessing in disguise."

Antoine frowned, but kept silent. Rumelles's words had cut him to the quick. And yet he could not deny that much the same idea had occurred to him when he had learned the truth regarding the last days of Jacques's life. It had occurred to him then, but now—well, he had come to take a very different view. Indeed, the mere remembrance that he had once felt thus about Jacques's death made him hot with shame. The last few years of war, the long sleepless nights of solitary musing at the hospital, had played havoc with so many preconceived ideas!

He had not the slightest desire to discuss with Rumelles his personal feelings on the matter, least of all in this place. For he had often taken Anne to dinner here in happier days, and, from the moment he had entered, associations of the past had added to his sensation of discomfort. He had been naively surprised to find a *de luxe* restaurant so crowded with people in this, the forty-fourth month of war. That night, indeed, Maxim's was as full as he had ever seen it in prewar days. There were perhaps fewer women, and those present were less elegantly dressed; there was a suggestion of the hospital nurse about a good many of them. Most of the men present were in uniform, their coats decorated with ribbons of every hue, their Sam Brownes glossy and close-fitting. The majority were staff officers or members of the Paris garrison troops, but some were obviously on leave from the fighting front. The air force,

too, was well in evidence: a noisy group, the focus of public admiration, but their eyes held curious experience and sadness, with a glint of desperation, and they gave the impression of being drunk before they had begun to drink. There was a motley assortment of Italian, Belgian, Rumanian, and Japanese uniforms, and a few naval officers were present. But most numerous were the British—in khaki, with stiff collars and immaculate starched shirts—who had come to Maxim's for a champagne dinner.

"Mind you let me know before the time comes for you to leave the hospital," said Rumelles in a friendly tone. "They mustn't send you to the front again. You've done your share, and more."

Antoine tried to put in a word; after having been certified as recovered from his first wound he had been assigned to medical duty in the back areas. But Rumelles went on speaking without a pause.

"Personally, I'm pretty sure to see the war through at the Foreign Office. When M. Clemenceau took over, there was some talk of sending me to London, and I'd certainly have been sidetracked there if President Poincaré, a good friend of mine, and especially M. Berthelot—I know all his little whims and he can't get along without me—hadn't put in a word on my behalf. Of course it would have been quite interesting to be in London just now. But I wouldn't have felt at the centre of things, as I do here. And it's thrilling, I assure you!"

"Oh, I can quite believe it. You, anyhow, are one of the favoured few who're able to understand what's really happening—and, I dare say, to forecast the future, to some extent."

"You're wrong there!" Rumelles broke in. "To understand—no; and to forecast, still less! One can have all the inside information that's obtainable, and yet be unable to make head or tail of how things are going; it's the utmost one can do to understand what has already happened. Don't imagine that any statesman today, even an autocratic, headstrong one like M. Clemenceau, has any real power of shaping the course of events. No, he's at their mercy. Governing a nation in wartime is rather like being captain of a ship that's leaking at every seam; one has to make shift hour by hour, as best one can, to stop the most dangerous leaks—with the risk of foundering always looming in the background. It's all one can do to snatch a moment now and then to take the sun, glance at the chart, set an approximate course. M. Clemenceau is in the same position as the other national leaders: he doesn't shape events, events shape him. The most he does is, whenever an opening occurs, to turn it to account. In my present post I've a close-up view of our great man. He's a curious type." He fell silent and his face grew thoughtful; when he spoke again, he interspersed his summing-up with studied pauses. "Yes, M. Clemenceau's character is a queer mixture of instinctive scepticism … considered pessimism and … resolute optimism. But there's no denying it's a most effective mixture!" He beamed complacently on Antoine, as if entertained by his own wit and relishing the neatness of the phrases he had just uttered. (As a matter of fact, he gave Antoine the impression of repeating something he had learned by rote and had probably been "unloading" on everyone he met for several months.) "And there's another thing," Rumelles continued. "Thoroughgoing sceptic though he is, he has a simple faith—which never falters: that the nation to which M. Clemenceau belongs is invincible. And that, my dear Thibault, is a tremendous asset. Even at this present moment, when —this is strictly between ourselves, of course—even the most confirmed optimists are feeling definitely rattled, well, this old patriot of ours has not the faintest doubt that we shall win the war. He seems convinced that, by some divine right, the cause of France must necessarily be victorious."

An English officer at a neighbouring table had just lit a cigar and Antoine's throat was tickling. When he tried to speak, his voice was so weak—the napkin he was holding to his lips muffled it still more—that only a few stray words were audible.

"… help from America … Wilson."

Rumelles thought it best to pretend he had heard everything, and even assumed an air of extreme interest. "Ah, yes," he murmured, stroking his chin meditatively. "President Wilson, as you say … but of course we've our own ideas about him at the F.O. In France and England we're obliged to show a certain deference for the fantastic notions of that worthy American professor; but we've no illusions as to what he is. He has what I may call a one-track mind; no sense of proportion. And for a statesman, that's disastrous. He lives in a sort of dream-world he has built up out of his imagination. Well meaning, I grant you, but heaven preserve us if this mystic-minded Puritan starts meddling with the complicated political machinery of our old Europe!"

Antoine would have wished to put in a word, but the state of his throat made it almost impossible. Of all the leading statesmen of the day Wilson was, to his thinking, the only one capable of looking beyond the war and planning for the future on broad lines. But the most Antoine could do now was to show his disagreement by an emphatic gesture.

Rumelles took it smilingly. "Oh, come now, old man! Don't tell me you've fallen for President Wilson's Utopian theories." He stretched his arm out, leaned forward, and, resting his plump, freckled hand on the tablecloth, continued in a confidential undertone. "In any case, those in the know assure us that President Wilson isn't quite so simple as he seems, and knows better than his famous 'Messages.' It seems that in championing a 'peace without victory' he has a wholly practical aim in view—to assure American preponderance in the Old World by preventing the Allies from reaping the fruits of victory, that's to say, from becoming the dominant force in world affairs. Well, if that's his plan, it doesn't say much for his insight. For no one with any sense could suppose that France and England would have bled themselves white during all these years of war if they didn't stand to get out of it some pretty solid and *material* benefit."

But, Antoine inwardly protested, if at last a real peace, a foolproof peace, could be contrived, surely that would be the most "material" gain the European nations could possibly get out of the war? But he did not voice his thought. The heat and noise, the fumes of food and the tobacco-smoke, were making him more and more ill at ease. His difficulty in breathing was increasing. He was furious with himself for having been so weak as to accept Rumelles's invitation, and ruefully reflected: I've a fine night in store!

But all this was lost on Rumelles, who seemed to take a personal pleasure in disparaging Wilson. For the bureaucrats at the Quai d'Orsay, Antoine supposed, the American President had come to be a target for their witticisms, their *bête noire*. Rumelles emphasized each sally with an angry little cackle, bobbing up and down on his chair as if he were sitting on live coals.

"Luckily President Poincaré and M. Clemenceau have the realistic outlook of the Latin races and they've realized the futility of the Wilsonian mirage. But don't forget that things have reached a point where reinforcements from America are absolutely indispensable. And once we've a big Yankee army on French soil to take a spell of duty at the front, we'll be able to get our second wind and sit tight while America settles Germany's hash for good and all."

In thoughtful mood Antoine watched Rumelles eating steak ("*Very* rare, please. Blue!" he had told the waiter). Then he raised his arm slightly, as if asking leave to speak.

"So you think the war will last—several years more?"

Pushing away his plate, Rumelles leaned back in his chair. "Several years? No, I shouldn't say that. In fact, I rather think we'll have some pleasant surprises quite soon." He gazed pensively at his fingernails for a moment, then, lowering his voice again, bent toward Antoine. "Listen, Thibault, I remember hearing M. Deschanel say one evening in my presence—it was in February, 1915—'It's impossible to estimate the duration of this war or the course that it will take. To my mind, it's a recrudescence of the wars following the Revolution. There may be truces; but a lasting peace is very far away!' When I heard that remark I hardly took it seriously. But today—well, today I'm more inclined to regard it as a flash of prophetic insight." He paused, toyed for a moment with the salt-cellar, then added: "So much so that if tomorrow the Allies win some spectacular victory and the Central Powers ask for an armistice, I shall think, like Monsieur Deschanel: Here's a truce, but the final, lasting peace is still far off."

He sighed, then, with that air of reciting a set piece which so exasperated Antoine, he launched into a masterly summary of the course of the war, beginning with the invasion of Belgium. Presented thus, with the successive phases summarized in clean-cut patterns, the march of events was seen to follow an amazingly logical sequence, move following move as in a game of chess. For the first time Antoine saw this war, in which he had taken part day after day, in full perspective, under its historical aspect. In Rumelles's eloquent résumé names like "Verdun," "the Marne," "the Somme," pregnant till now for Antoine with tragically vivid personal associations, were suddenly stripped of immediate reality and became landmarks in a technical epitome, chapter headings in a handbook for the use of history students.

"That brings us to 1918," Rumelles said in conclusion; "the entry of America into the war, the tightening up of the blockade, and the breakdown of German morale. Logically, their defeat became inevitable. In these circumstances they had the choice of two alternatives: either to try for a patched-up peace before it was too late or to stake all on a mass offensive before the bulk of the American troops had come over. They chose the second solution; hence the 'big push' in Picardy last March. Once again it was touch-and-go for us. Now they're returning to the attack. That's how things stand now. Will they bring it off this time? It's just possible that we may find ourselves obliged to sue for peace before the summer's over. But if they fail, they'll have played their last card. In short, they'll have lost the war—whether we stay our hands till the Americans are over in full force or—as, I gather, is Foch's intention—we fling our last troops into a general attack on all fronts and establish ourselves firmly in enemy territory before the Americans throw their full weight into the scales. That's why I'm inclined to say that the prospect of a real peace, a lasting peace, may well be still remote, but a *truce* may come at any moment."

He had to stop talking; the fit of coughing that had come over Antoine was so severe that it would have been difficult for Rumelles, this time, to feign he had not noticed it.

"Sorry, old man; I'm afraid my chatter has been too much for you. Let's be going."

He beckoned to the headwaiter, in the best American style, drew a wad of notes from his trouser-pocket, and settled the bill after a casual glance.

In the Rue Royale blackout reigned; the lights of the cars drawn up by the curb were out. Rumelles gazed up at the sky.

"A clear sky. 'They' may very well pay us a visit tonight. I must get back to the F.O. to see if anything's come in. But I'll drive you home first."

Antoine stepped into the car. Before joining him, Rumelles bought several evening papers at the bookstall.

"Eyewash!" Antoine muttered.

Before replying, Rumelles took care to close the sliding window behind the driver. "Of course it's eyewash!" Rumelles retorted almost aggressively. "Don't you realize it's just as necessary to supply the country with its daily ration of optimistic news as to supply the troops with ammunition?"

"Ah, yes," Antoine murmured ironically. "I was forgetting you have the 'cure of souls.' "

Rumelles tapped his friend's knee reprovingly. "You may laugh, Thibault, but it's a serious matter. Just think. What can a government do in wartime? Control the course of events? Impossible, as you know. But public opinion's another matter. *That*, anyhow, the government can control; in fact, it's the one and only thing it can control. Well, here's where we come in. Our principal task is—how shall I put it?—this adjustment of the facts before they reach the public. We have to see that the news is such as to reinforce the public confidence in victory. And it's equally important to safeguard day by day the trust the nation has come to repose in its leaders, military and civil."

"By fair means or foul, it's all the same?"

Rumelles's only answer was a slight shrug of his shoulders.

After crawling down the dimly lit Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Rue de l'Université, the car had pulled up at Antoine's door. The two men stepped out. Rumelles was still speaking. "For instance, there was the week of Nivelle's offensive in April 1917." The febrile eagerness Antoine had noticed before had again crept into his voice, and, grasping Antoine's arm, he drew him out of the driver's earshot. "You can't imagine what it was like for us, who followed each stage of it hour by hour and saw blunder heaped on blunder and each night reckoned up our losses. Thirty-four thousand killed and over eighty thousand wounded in four or five days. Followed by a mutiny of the regiments concerned—what was left of them! But there could be no question of admitting the facts or doing justice; at all costs the mutiny had to be suppressed before it spread to other regiments. It was a matter of life or death for the nation. So we had to bolster up the General Staff, camouflage their blunders, save their face. Worse still, with our eyes open to the folly of it, we had to carry on, resume the offensive, throw more divisions into the shambles and sacrifice twenty or twenty-five thousand men more at Chemin-des-Dames and Laffaux."

"But why?"

"To score a small success, however trifling, upon which we could graft the 'serviceable lie.' And to restore confidence, which had been badly shaken everywhere. At last we had a stroke of luck in the Craonne attack. We magnified it into a splendid victory. We were saved! Ten days later the government ousted the generals responsible and put Petain in command."

Ready to drop with weariness, Antoine was leaning against the wall. Rumelles helped him to the doorway.

"Yes, we were saved. But I assure you I'd rather give up a year of my life than have to live through those few weeks again." He sounded sincere. "Well, I must be off now. So glad to have seen you again." As Antoine was going in, he called after him. "Now do

look after yourself properly, old man. You doctors are all alike: devoted to your patients, but criminally careless when your own health is concerned."

Gise had got the bedroom ready. The shutters were closed and the curtains drawn; the slip-covers had been removed from the chairs and the bed made. A carafe of water and a tumbler stood on the bedside table, within easy reach. Antoine was so much affected by these small tokens of solicitude that he said to himself: "I must be even more run down than I realized… ."

The first thing he did was to give himself an oxygen injection. Then he sank into an easy-chair and remained sitting bolt-upright, his shoulders propped against the back, for ten minutes. He caught himself thinking of Rumelles with a sudden, fierce hostility, unjust no doubt, which took him by surprise. Then, "No," he murmured; "between us and *them* there can be no reconcilement, between us who've been at the front and those who stayed behind."

He was feeling a little easier in the chest. Rising, he checked his temperature: 100.6. Nothing exceptional after such a day.

Before turning in, he was careful to take a prolonged inhalation.

"No," he muttered again, as ragefully he buried his head in the pillow, "there's no possibility of pulling along with them. When demobilization comes, the men who stayed behind will have to lie low, stand aside. The France, the Europe of tomorrow will belong, as of right, to the men who fought in the war. And in every country they'll refuse to have any dealings with the men who did not fight."

The gloom weighed on him like a pall, but he refrained from switching on the light. This room, formerly M. Thibault's bedroom, had been the scene of the old man's painful illness and death-agony, and Antoine clearly recalled each detail: the bath shortly before he died, Jacques's assistance, the merciful injection, the watchers at the deathbed, the quiet close. And before his eyes staring wide open into the dark there formed a clean-cut picture of the room as it had looked then, with the huge mahogany bed, the chest of drawers laden with medicine-bottles, and the old tapestry-upholstered prie-dieu.

# Chapter VI

THANKS to the oxygen injection, Antoine had passed a fairly comfortable, if all but sleepless, night. Finally, toward dawn, he had dropped into a doze, which had lasted long enough to involve him in a preposterous nightmare. It had brought on an attack of sweating so profuse as to awake him and necessitate a change of pyjamas. On returning to bed, with little hope, however, of getting any more sleep, he occupied his mind with conjuring up the sequence of his fantastic dream.

"Let's see. There were three distinct episodes, three scenes, but all in the same setting: the hall of my apartment.

"At first I was there with Léon, half mad with terror at the thought that Father might come home at any moment. It was an appalling situation. I'd taken advantage of Father's absence to take over his belongings; I'd ransacked the whole house. And now Father was going to return; I'd be caught red-handed. What a ghastly mess! I paced up and down the hall, racking my brains to find a way of staving off disaster. There was no question of quitting the house… . Now why was that? Because of Gise, who would be back in a few minutes. Léon, as panic-stricken as myself, was keeping watch, his ear glued to the front door. I can still see that goggle eye of his, dilated with alarm. Once he looked round in my direction, saying: 'Hadn't I better go and tell the mistress?'

"That was scene Number One. In the second, Father was planted there in front of me in the middle of the hall, wearing a frock-coat and top-hat with a band of crape—like Chasle's—*because of the funeral*. (What funeral?) On the floor beside him was a brand-new valise, like the one I brought with me to Paris yesterday. Léon had vanished. Father, fussily, but in a very dignified way, was fumbling in his pockets. When he noticed me, he said: 'Ah, there you are! What's become of Mademoiselle?' Then went on in the paternal, pompous tone he used on such occasions: 'Ah, my dear boy, I've lots to tell you; I've been in strange countries, most peculiar places.' My mouth was parched; I couldn't get a word out. I was again a little boy, trembling at the prospect of a well-earned punishment. And all the time I was wondering: 'How on earth didn't he notice all the changes, on his way up the stairs? That the stained-glass windows had gone? The new carpet?' Then, in a rush of panic, I thought: 'How am I to stop him from entering our room, and seeing the bed?' Then—no, I can't remember, there's a blank here.

"In the last scene Father was standing at the same spot, but in carpet slippers and that old plaid jacket he used to wear at home. He was in one of his black moods, jabbing forward his small, peaked beard and tugging at his neck to free it from the collar-wings. Then, with that frosty little laugh of his he said: 'And now perhaps you'll tell me, my dear boy, where you've put my spectacles?' I knew at once what he meant—the tortoise-shell spectacles I'd found in his study and made over, along with his clothes and personal effects, to the Little Sisters of the Poor. Then suddenly he flared up and strode toward me. 'And my securities? What have you done with them?' 'What securities do you mean, Father?' I panted. I was sweating heavily and as I mopped my face I remember listening for the click of the elevator-door. I was expecting Gise to appear at any moment—in nurse's uniform, of course; it was the time she came back from her hospital. And then—I woke up, dripping with sweat, as in my dream."

The memory of his panic fear made him smile, but he was still labouring under its effects. It struck him that he must have a slight temperature… . Yes, 100. Better than yesterday evening, but this morning it should have been practically normal.

When he was in his bathroom two hours later, washing and gargling his throat, his thoughts sped back to the dream. "The queer thing," he mused, "when one looks into it, is how short it was. Three flashlike episodes, all told: a brief phase of suspense, with Léon; Father's sudden appearance with the valise; the talk about the spectacles and securities. Yet how much more there was to it than that! It was, so to speak, the uprush of something infinitely vaster, a self-contained totality—my whole past."

Feeling a slight difficulty in breathing, because of his having stayed on his feet too long, Antoine sat down on the edge of the bathtub, and let his thoughts run on.

"It's curious how the past always provides the groundwork of our dreams—a fact which must often have been observed and has probably been investigated. Still, it's a new idea to me. Now, that dream of mine last night—it's a particularly striking case in point. In fact, I might summon up my energy and write it out, or I'll have forgotten all about it in a couple of days."

He glanced at the clock. Plenty of time to spare. He fetched the diary in which every night he wrote up his clinical observations on his illness and which he had been careful to bring with him. Then, after tearing out some blank pages and wrapping himself in the bathrobe hanging on one of the pegs—"Dear little Gise," he smiled, "she thought of everything!"—he went back to the bedroom and lay down on the bed.

He had been scribbling away enthusiastically for three-quarters of an hour when there was a ring at the bell. It was a special-delivery letter from Philip, couched in affectionate terms, explaining that he had to be away from Paris for two days—he was at the head of a commission appointed to inspect the hospitals of the Northern Command—but hoped Antoine would come and see him on Wednesday evening.

It was a great disappointment for Antoine; still, he reminded himself, things might have been worse; it was lucky he was not obliged to return to Grasse before next Thursday.

The pages from his diary, five in all, were scattered on the bed, covered with his curious handwriting, which had the look of hieroglyphs, each letter being separated from its neighbours—a trick acquired in the days when he had had to do Greek themes. The first two sheets contained an analytical description of the dream, including all the characteristic details he could recall. The other three were devoted to a commentary on these data. It was one of Antoine's pet ideas that clear thinking conduces to clear writing, and it annoyed him to find his annotations somewhat lacking in lucidity. Yet, in earlier days, he had excelled in the art of setting forth in a few pithy sentences all the essentials of an elaborate thought-sequence. "If I'm to start contributing again to the reviews," he told himself, "I'll have to get my mind back into training."

This is what he had written:

> In a dream there are two distinct elements:
>
> (1) The dream proper, its happenings (in which the dreamer always participates to some extent). These happenings (the *plot*) are like a scene in a stage play: they are usually brief, scrappy, but teeming with action.

(2) Environing this tense dramatic nucleus there is a given *situation*, which shapes it, gives it plausibility. This situation lies outside the actual happenings and nowhere intrudes on them. But the dreamer is definitely aware of its presence. And, in the texture of the dream, that situation is presented to him as one in which the dreamer has been involved over a long period. It is comparable with all that a man's past connotes for him in the waking state.

In the case of the dream I had last night, I find that each of its three episodes is surrounded by a complex of circumstances which, though not actually participating in the action of the dream, were implicitly embodied in it. And, in fact, if one looks more closely into it, these "circumstances" are found to be of two kinds, disposed, as it were, in two successive zones. We have the immediate circumstances, closely massed round the nucleus. And then we have a second zone, further removed from it in time: an agglomeration of much older circumstances, forming an imaginary past without which the dream would not have been possible. This past, of which I, the dreamer, was constantly aware, played no part in the course of the dream itself; it was merely pre-existent as regards the dream, much as the past of the characters in a play is pre-existent to the action on the stage.

Now to go further into detail. What I mean by a "circumstance of the first zone" is, for instance, that I *knew* the time it was, though in the dream there was no question of the hour. I *knew* it was a few minutes before noon and that I was expecting Gise to come home for lunch as usual. I knew that earlier in the morning, when she was out and I'd no means of communicating with her, I had received a wire from Father to say he was returning for the funeral. (An obscure point, that. *Whose* funeral? Not Mademoiselle's. But it must have been the funeral of a member of our household, for we were all affected by this bereavement.) I *knew* that Father was fumbling in his pocket for money to pay his fare, for I *knew* that a taxi, laden with luggage, had just set him down at the front door (I think I might go so far as to say I could see the taxi waiting in the street simultaneously with seeing Father in the hall).

Circumstances of the second zone. By this I mean a group of events fairly remote in time and within the knowledge of the dream Antoine. I cannot definitely affirm that I actually thought about these events while the dream was in progress; but their memory was implicit in me (as are one's memories of real life). Thus I *knew* (more precisely: there was the knowledge in me) that Father had been away from France for a long while, that he had been deputed by some social service group to make investigations bearing on his charities, in some distant land. (A study of conditions in foreign penitentiaries, or something of the sort.) He had had so far to go that it was as if he were never to return. I *knew*, too, exacdy how we had felt regarding his departure; it had been for us all as welcome as it was unexpected. I knew that, once I had escaped his leading-strings, I had married Gise. Then we had taken possession of the apartment and made a clean sweep of everything within it, selling off the furniture, handing over Father's belongings to the sisters, pulling down walls, and thoroughly transforming the whole place. (But, in the dream, oddly enough, these changes were not the changes that I actually made. Thus, though in the dream the hall had been repainted light yellow as it is now, the carpet was red, not brown, and where the console-table now is there stood the old oak grandfather's clock Father used to have in the morning-room.) There is much more than this; in fact, the list of things I *knew* would run to many pages. Thus I *knew* quite definitely that our bedroom, Gise's and mine (where, be it noted, nothing took place in the dream), was the room that had been Father's and that it had come to look like Anne's bedroom in her Paris house. Still more noteworthy is that I knew that Léon had not had time that morning to tidy up the apartment and our big bed was still unmade; and I was appalled at the thought that Father would be sure to enter our room. There were hosts of other details of our domestic life and circumstances that I knew. One of the most striking is that, though my brother played no part whatever in the dream, I *knew* that Jacques, desperately jealous, had moved to Switzerland soon after our marriage, and …

There, abruptly, the writing ended… . Antoine felt no desire now to complete it. He merely added a marginal note in pencil:

Look up all that's been written on the subject by authorities on the phenomena of dreams.

Then, after folding the sheets, he put a kettle on the gas for his inhalation.

Presently, his head cocooned in towels, eyes closed, and cheeks streaming, he was drawing in deep breaths of the healing vapour—his thoughts still busy with his dream. It suddenly struck him that its whole theme betokened an uneasy conscience, a sense of responsibility, indeed of guilt, which in the waking state his pride kept in abeyance. "And it's a fact," he murmured; "I've no reason to feel proud of my behavior since Father's death." He had in mind not only the luxurious appointments of his home, but also his liaison with Anne, his incursions into Parisian night-life—all symptoms of a steadily increasing self-indulgence. "A regular rake's progress," he ruefully admitted to himself. "And, on top of it all, I've lost the greater part of the fortune left me by my father." He had spent a good half of his father's personal estate on improvements to the house; as for the remainder, dissatisfied with the low yield of the investments made by prudent M. Thibault, he had sold them out and replaced them by Russian stock, which had recently dropped to zero. "Well, well! It's a fool's game, nursing vain regrets," he told himself. It was thus that he had come to call his scruples. And yet—his dream was evidence of this—deep within his heart, he still cherished the middle-class respect for a "family fortune," slowly amassed and handed down from father to son. Although answerable to no one but himself, he felt ashamed of having squandered, in less than a year, a patrimony built up by the industry and prudence of several generations.

He uncovered his head for a few seconds, took some breaths of fresh air and dabbed his swollen eyes, then buried his head again under the swath of moist, warm towels.

His musings on those spendthrift months before the war linked up with the depression that had come over him the previous afternoon, after Gise had left, when roaming through his spacious laboratory, abandoned now to dust and solitude, and his pompously entitled "record room," with its pigeonholes for case-books, and racks of brand-new numbered and lettered filing-cases—all empty. He had entered, too, the lavishly equipped surgery, which had never once been used. And there his thoughts had harked back to the humble little apartment on the ground floor in which he had started his career, the useful career of an energetic young doctor, and he had realized that, after his father's death, he had given a wrong direction to his life.

The inhaler was cooling down, the jet of steam diminishing. Throwing aside the soaked towels, Antoine dried his face, then went back to the bedroom. Facing the mirror, he tested his voice: "Ah … eh … ah … oh …" Though still hoarse, it had regained its timbre, and he felt his throat clear for the moment.

"Twenty minutes' breathing-exercises. Then ten minutes' rest. After that I'll pack my things and, as I can't see Philip today, take the first train to Maisons."

On his way to the station, as the car was crossing the Tuileries Gardens, his gaze roved idly from the statues dotted among the lawns, and gleaming white under the morning sun, to the graceful outlines of the Arc du Carrousel, blurred by a haze of tenuous blue. And suddenly there came back to him how on a May morning like this he and Anne had met near by, in the Louvre courtyard, and a new thought waylaid him. He called to the driver.

"Take me to the entrance of the Bois. By the Rue Spontini, please."

When they were near the Battaincourts' house, he told the chauffeur to drive slowly and leaned out of the window. All the shutters were closed; the gateway was shut. On the caretaker's lodge hung a notice:

FOR SALE
THIS DESIRABLE RESIDENCE
*Inner Courtyard. Garage. Garden*

Under "FOR SALE" the words "OR TO LET" had been chalked in.

The car was slowly passing alongside the garden wall. Antoine felt nothing, literally nothing: neither emotion, nor regret. And now he wondered what had persuaded him to make this pointless pilgrimage.

"Turn back, please, and drive to the Saint-Lazare station," he called to the taximan.

"Yes," he said to himself almost at once, as if nothing had interrupted his previous train of thought, "yes, I was fooling myself to the top of my bent when I decided that I had to reorganize my professional career. Reorganize! Why, instead of furthering my work, all those material facilities put a stop to it. All the machinery was there, and running smoothly—only it turned out nothing. Everything was set for some big, epoch-making enterprise. And in reality I just stayed put, twiddling my thumbs!" Suddenly he recalled his brother's attitude toward the fortune left them by their father, Jacques's high disdain for money—which Antoine at the time had thought so fatuous. "But Jacques was right. How much better we'd understand each other, he and I, today! Money acts like a poison. Especially money one's come into, unearned capital. I'd have been done for—but for the war. I should never have got the money-virus out of my system. I had come to think one can buy everything, and to regard the habit of doing little work oneself and making others work for one as the birthright of the well-to-do. Without a blush I'd have personally taken the credit for any discovery made by Jousselin or Studler in my laboratory. A profiteer, that's what I was in a fair way of becoming. I enjoyed the mastery that money gives one, the deference that wealth assured me. And I'd almost come to find this deference quite natural, and to believe that my money really made me a superior being. Pretty disgusting that, when one thinks about it! And there's something more: all contacts between a wealthy man and those around him are tainted with suspicion, falsified. I was already getting to mistrust everything and everybody. That's one of the insidious ways money has of rotting a man's character. Yes, I was beginning to wonder, even where my best friends were concerned: 'Now why did he say that? Is it my chequebook that he's getting at?' Pretty foul, that! Pretty foul!"

So bitter was the self-reproach that came of stirring up the dregs of his past life that he felt a vast relief at finding the taxi had reached Saint-Lazare. And as he pushed his way through the crowd around the ticket-offices, he hardly noticed the effort that it cost him, so glad was he of this distraction from his thoughts.

"A first—no, a third-class ticket for Maisons-Lafitte, please. When does the next train leave?"

He had rarely travelled third. And in doing so now, he felt a kind of Spartan satisfaction.

# Chapter VII

CLOTILDE had knocked at the door. Balancing the tray on one hand, she waited a few moments, then knocked again. No answer. Vexed at the thought that Antoine had gone out without having his early cup of milk and rolls, she opened the door.

The room was in darkness. Antoine was still in bed. He had heard the knock, but, as usual in the mornings before his inhalation, his voice was so feeble that he did not think it worth while trying to say: "Come in!" He endeavoured to convey this by signs to Clotilde.

Though he accompanied his curious gestures with a reassuring smile, the worthy woman remained standing on the threshold, her eyebrows arched in consternation. Had he not come and had a nice talk with her in the kitchen last night, soon after his arrival? What could have happened? The idea crossed her mind that he had had a stroke and was partially paralysed. Guessing her thought, Antoine smiled still more genially and beckoned her toward the bed. Then, taking the pad and pencil lying on the bedside table, he scribbled: "Slept well. But I've never any voice in the mornings."

She slowly puzzled out the words, gazed at him incredulously, then blurted out: "That's as it may be, but we didn't look to see you in this state. Them Boches made a nice job of you, sir, to be sure."

She went to the window and drew up the Venetian blinds. A burst of sunlight flooded the room. The sky was blue and, through a wreathed trellis of Virginia creeper spanning the wooden balcony, Antoine could see the fir trees in the garden and, farther off, the treetops of the Saint-Germain woods, dappled with early green and lightly swaying in the morning breeze.

Clotilde came back to the bedside. "Will you be able to eat, sir, seeing the state you're in?" she inquired anxiously as she filled the cup with hot milk. While Antoine broke some bread into the cup, she moved back a step and stared at him, her hands thrust in her apron pockets. He had so much difficulty in swallowing that she could not refrain from comment.

"We never dreamt you were that ill, sir. When the news came that you'd been gassed, I said to myself: Anyhow, it ain't so bad as if the master had been wounded.' But seemingly it's just as bad. I'm not like my sister Adrienne; there's nothing she don't know about diseases. When you wrote us to go with Mile. Gise to Mme. Fontanin's hospital, Adrienne was pleased no end. 'That's fine!' says she. 'I'm going to nurse wounded soldiers.' Then I says to her: 'See here, Adrienne, I'll do all the chores and cooking that they want—I ain't work-shy—but as for nursing wounded soldiers, no, it ain't my line.' So I stayed back here, and Adrienne went to work for the ladies at the hospital. I don't complain, though I have to keep at it from morn till night. There's a sight too much work in this hostel, as they call it, for one woman, without any help, and that's the truth. But I'd rather slave twenty-four hours a day here than have to go paddling in blood and gore at that there hospital like Adrienne!"

Antoine smiled. Still, he reflected, it was a pity she had this prejudice against hospital work. In default of Gise, it would have been rather pleasant to be nursed back to health by this simple, devoted creature.

To show that he appreciated the arduousness of her daily task, he pursed his lips sympathetically and slowly moved his head from side to side.

"Oh," she hastily put in, seized by compunction, "when all's said and done, it ain't so tiring as it sounds. The ladies are away nearly all day at the hospital. And I've only M. Daniel and Mme. Jenny and the kiddie at lunchtime."

More familiar than in the past—it was as if the war years had levelled out certain differences—she began airing her opinions of everyone in the household, with the utmost freedom. The spate of words was deafening, but Antoine picked up a phrase here and there: "Mile. Gise, she's always kindness itself." "You can't never talk to Mme. Fontanin; 'tain't that she's really so stand-offish, but she doesn't make you feel at ease." "Mme. Nicole now, she's a proper harum-scarum, but you can't say 'No' to her." "Mme. Jenny ain't much of a talker, but her head's screwed on the right way, and she's a fine worker." But all her talk centred on the "kiddie," in tones of love and admiration.

"Ah, he's a promising child, and no mistake. He takes after the poor master; he'll make himself obeyed." (Yes, Antoine reflected, we mustn't forget he's Father's grandson.) "Why, he'd drive us all crazy if we let him have his way. You can't imagine what that kiddie's like, sir. Like a bit of quicksilver, a proper little imp of mischief. He won't obey no one. A good thing M. Daniel's always there to look after him; you can't trust him out of your sight a moment. Anyhow, it keeps M. Daniel busy, else he'd be moping about alone there all day, with nothing to do but chew his gum." She wagged her head knowingly. "But I've a notion, sir, there's some these days who ain't sorry they got a *leg* that's ailing."

Antoine reached for his writing-pad. "Léon?" he wrote.

"Léon, poor fellow!" But it seemed she had little news to give of Antoine's old butler. (He had been taken prisoner near Charleroi after a fortnight's active service, on the day following his arrival in the front line. On learning the number of his prison camp, Antoine had instructed Clotilde to send him a basket of food each month. Each was acknowledged by Léon on a three-word postcard. He never gave any news about himself.) "What do you think he wrote and asked us for? A flute! Mile. Gise bought one and sent it to him."

Antoine had finished his bread and milk. Clotilde took up the tray. "I've got to go down and help Mme. Jenny. Tuesday's her washing-day and she can't lift the tub by herself. A kiddie dirties a lot of linen, that's sure." Going out, she paused in the doorway to give Antoine a parting glance of inspection. Suddenly the flat features took on a meditative air.

"Eh, M. Antoine, who'd ever have dreamed it—all we been through in the last few years. All these changes! As I often says to Adrienne, 'If the old master could come back on earth … if he could see all that's happened since he left us …!'"

As soon as she had gone, Antoine began dressing. He took his time about it; there was no hurry. He intended to give himself a thorough course of treatment before going downstairs. "If the old master could come back …!" Clotilde's remark had reminded him of his dream. What an ascendancy Father still has over us! he thought.

It was past eleven when he reopened the window, which he had closed so as to do his breathing-exercises without being heard.

A man's voice floated up to him from the garden. "Hi, Paul! Get down from there! Come over here." Like a distant echo came a woman's voice, calm and clear: "Now, Paul, be a good boy. Do what Uncle Dan tells you."

He stepped out onto the balcony and glanced down across the curtain of Virginia creeper. Immediately under him was the narrow terrace overlooking the old ditch that separated the garden from the forest. In the shadow of the two great plane trees—Mme. de Fontanin's favourite retreat in the old days—Daniel was lounging in a wicker chair, a book on his knees. Some yards from him a little boy in a pale-blue jumper was trying to climb the parapet, with the aid of a small bucket placed bottom upward, evidently for that purpose, beside the wall. At the far end of the terrace, through the open, sunlit doorway of what used to be the gardener's cottage, Jenny could be seen bending over a washtub, her sleeves rolled up, arms flecked with soapsuds.

"Come along, Paul!"

A lock of red-brown tousled hair glinted in the sunlight; the child had deigned to turn. But, to show his independence, he composedly sat down on the ground and, drawing his shovel toward him, began filling the bucket with sand.

When, a few moments later, Antoine came down the steps, little Paul was still seated at the same spot.

Daniel called: "Come and say good morning to Uncle Antoine!"

Squatting at the foot of the wall, the child went on shovelling sand into the bucket, as if he had not heard. As Antoine approached, he lowered his head still more. Feeling himself seized, swung off his feet, he struggled for a moment with his captor, then, with a merry laugh, gave in.

"So Uncle Antoine's a nasty man?"

"Oo, yes! Awful nasty!"

Breathless with the exertion, Antoine set down the child and came back to Daniel. But no sooner was he seated than little Paul ran up, clambered up on his knees, and, snuggling against his tunic, pretended to fall asleep.

Daniel had not stirred from his chair. He was wearing an old striped tennis-shirt without a de and shabby dark-grey trousers. On the foot of his artificial limb he had a black boot; on the other, which was bare, a carpet slipper. He had filled out; his features still had their grace of outline, but they had coarsened. With his blue, stubbly chin and overlong hair he brought to mind one of those elderly provincial actors who, careless of their person in the daytime, nightly regain something of the old glamour by benefit of footlights. Antoine, who ever since rising had been busy attending to his throat, noticed—without attaching undue importance to it—that the young man, after languidly shaking hands with him, did not make the least inquiry about his health. (As a matter of fact, however, they had compared notes on the previous evening regarding their respective plights.) At a loss what to say, Antoine made a vague, interrogative gesture toward the large, albumlike volume Daniel had just closed and placed on the gravel path.

"Oh, that's an old *Round the World*, the travel magazine, you know. For the year 1877!" Picking up the book, he fluttered the pages idly. "It's full of pictures. We have the whole set in the house."

Absent-mindedly Antoine was fondling little Paul's hair; the child seemed lost in reverie, his head pillowed on his uncle's chest and his eyes wide open.

"What's the news this morning? Have you seen the papers?" Antoine asked.

"No."

"They gave us to understand, these last few days, that the Supreme War Council proposed to extend Foch's command to the Italian front."

"Really!"

"I dare say it's been announced officially today."

Jean-Paul wriggled down from Antoine's knee, as if he had just discovered he was bored. In one breath Uncle Dan and Uncle Antoine asked: "Where are you off to?"

"I'm going to Mummy."

Hopping twice on each foot in turn, the little boy scampered toward the gardener's cottage, under the amused observation of the two grownups. Daniel took a package of chewing-gum from his pocket and held it out to Antoine.

"No, thanks."

"It helps to pass the time," Daniel explained. "I've given up smoking." He put a large chunk into his mouth and began chewing.

Antoine smiled. "That reminds me of an experience I had in the war. At Villers-Bretonneux. We'd installed our dressing-station in a farmhouse that had been used for some months by an American Red Cross unit. Well, our orderlies had to spend a whole day chipping the lumps of chewing-gum from walls and doors and chairs and tables. I never saw such a disgusting mess! The filthy stuff was as hard as cement; they had to chisel it off. If the Anglo-Saxon occupation lasts another year or two, the furniture in NorthEast France will lose its form completely, buried under a foot or two of solid chewing-gum." A slight access of coughing made him pause for a moment. "Like those rocks in the Pacific … you know … which have become … huge mounds of guano."

Daniel smiled. Like Jacques, Antoine had always been particularly susceptible to the charm of Daniel's smile, and it gave him pleasure now to see that the smile had lost nothing of its fascination. True there was some grossness now about the features, but the upper lip curled up in the same odd, lopsided way and with the same tantalizing slowness, while a roguish twinkle crept into the half-shut eyes.

Antoine could not stop coughing; he made a gesture of mingled vexation and disheartenment. "You see … what a wheezy … old fogy I am these days." He got the words out with an effort. On recovering his breath, he added: "Yes, as Clotilde said just now, them Boches made a nice job of me. And even so I suppose we must count ourselves amongst the privileged few."

"You, perhaps," Daniel said hastily, under his breath.

There followed a minute's silence, broken, this time, by Daniel, "You asked me if I'd read the papers. I hadn't—I read them as little as possible. I'm only too apt to think about—all that. I've lost the power of thinking about anything else. And as for reading those communiqués, when one knows, as we do, exactly what the words signify. 'Slight activity in such-and-such a sector.' 'Successful raid at such-and-such a place.' No!" He let his head sink onto the back of the chair, and closed his eyes. "One has to have gone over the top, to have taken part in an infantry attack, to … understand. So long as I was in the cavalry, I knew nothing about war. Still, I'd been in one or two charges. A charge—that, too, doesn't bear talking about. But it's nothing compared to an infantry attack, waiting behind the parapet for zero hour, and going over with fixed bayonets." He shivered, opened his eyes, and stared up for a moment at the treetops, chewing his gum ragefully. "Actually how many of us are there, all told, in the back areas who know what it's like? The

men who've come back from the front—how many are they? And, anyhow, why should they talk about it? No, they can't, or they won't say anything. They know that nobody would understand them."

He fell silent. The two men remained for some minutes without exchanging a word, without even looking at each other. Then Antoine spoke in a slow, uncertain tone, pausing at whiles to cough. "There are times when I tell myself this is the last war, that it's unthinkable there should ever be another. Yes, sometimes I feel sure of it. But there are other times when … I'm not so sure."

Daniel chewed away in silence, gazing into the distance. His face was expressionless.

Antoine said no more. The strain of speaking for several minutes on end was too much for him. But inwardly he followed up the same train of thought, for the hundredth or thousandth time. "When one reckons up dispassionately all that stands in the way of 'peace among men,'—it's appalling! How many centuries will elapse before the course of moral evoludon (assuming there is such a process) has purged man of his congenital intolerance, his innate respect for brute force, and the insensate pleasure the human animal feels in beating an enemy to his knees and forcibly imposing his own ways of living and feeling on others weaker than himself, who live differently, feel otherwise? And then, of course, there's the political factor, the self-interest of governments. When a government's in a tight corner, it's always a temptation for the men in power, the men who can start a war and make others bear the brunt of it, to fake a *casus belli*—and save their precious skins. It's such an easy way out; one hardly dares to hope that governments will never have recourse to it again. Which can only be if that way out is marked: *No thoroughfare*; if pacifist ideas have taken root so firmly in men's minds and become so widespread as to set up an impassable barrier against the war-mongers. And that's too much to hope for, as things are. What's more, even if pacifism triumphed, would it really mean that peace had come to stay? Even if some day, in certain lands of Europe, pacifist parties held the reins of power, how could one be sure they would not yield to the temptation of starting a war for the satisfaction of imposing, by force, their pacifist ideology on the other countries that did not share their views?" Clotilde's voice rang out gaily from the kitchen door. "Now then, Master Paul!" She came toward them, carrying a tray on which were a bowl of porridge, some stewed prunes, and a mug of milk, and placed them on the garden-table.

"Hurry up, Paul!" cried Daniel.

The little boy came running across the sunlit terrace as fast as his small, sturdy legs could carry him. The blue of his jumper, faded by repeated washings, exactly matched the pale blue of his eyes. Once again Antoine was struck by his resemblance to Jacques, when Jacques was the same age. "The same forehead," he mused, "the same ridge in his hair, the same rather blotchy complexion with a chequerwork of tiny freckles round the small, wrinkled nose." Stalwart Clotilde had swung him off his feet and was settling him on a chair. He submitted docilely to her attentions. Antoine gave him a smile, but little Paul, supposing he was being laughed at, looked away, then shot a furtive, hostile glance in Antoine's direction. There was the same elusive quality in his regard that used to be in Jacques's; changeful as an April sky, his eyes were now laughing or cajoling, now fretful or, as at the present moment, fiercely defiant, hard as steel. But behind all these surface fluctuations always their expression remained keen, precociously alert.

Jenny came through the sunlight toward them; her sleeves were rolled up, her hands swollen from the hot water, her apron spattered with suds. She gave Antoine a brief, affectionate smile.

"What sort of night did you have? … No, my hands are all wet… . Did you sleep all right?"

"Better than usual, thanks."

Watching Jenny now, Antoine could hardly believe that this buxom young woman, who accepted the duties of motherhood, the drudgery of menial tasks, with such natural ease, had once been that stiff, reserved young person in a dark, severely cut tailor-made costume whom Jacques had brought to his place on the day of mobilization.

She turned to Daniel. "Please be a dear and see he eats his porridge. I've got to go back. I haven't hung out my washing to dry yet." She tucked a napkin into her son's collar and fondled the little birdlike neck. "Now, Paul, be a good boy and eat your porridge. Uncle Dan will help you. I'll be back in a moment."

"Yes, Mam-ma." He made a little pause between the syllables, as Daniel and Jenny always did.

Daniel had risen from his easy-chair and seated himself beside the child. He had evidently been following up his previous train of thought, for no sooner was his sister gone than he went on as if there had been no interruption: "And there's something else, something one can hardly find words for and of which nobody who hasn't been at the front has the least notion. I mean that sort of miracle which always took place when one went up the line. For one thing, that incredible sense of liberation which came of knowing one was a mere puppet in the hands of fate, that one had made a blind surrender of one's will, and that one had no personal choice about anything at all. And then"—his voice was vibrant with emotion—"there was that marvellous *camaraderie* of the trenches, that feeling of brotherhood which came of sharing the same hardships, the same perils… . One had only to be moved back into a rest-camp, a few hours' march behind the lines, to realize how miraculous that mood had been—and to become an individual again."

Antoine nodded without speaking. His own memories of the war were chiefly of mud and blood, but he understood what Daniel meant: that unique fellowship of the men under fire, co-partners in calamity, in which, as in a mystical communion, the individual self was fined away and merged in a collective soul.

Intimidated by Antoine's presence, little Paul submitted to being spoonfed by Daniel, whose dexterity in tipping spoonfuls of porridge into the child's open mouth, while carrying on a conversation, proved him no novice in the technique of male nursemaid.

It suddenly struck Antoine that this little scene was as unpredictable four years ago as anything could be. Who ever could have foreseen Daniel ill-dressed, decrepit, playing the part of nursemaid; or the existence of this child, son of Jacques and Jenny P "And yet," he mused, "thus and thus it has turned out—and I feel little or no wonder. It's amazing how what *is* usurps the mind—to the exclusion of all the might-have-beens. Once anything has happened, we seem to lose the power of even conceiving that it might equally well not have happened. Or could have happened quite otherwise… ." For some moments he let his thoughts drift on in desultory speculation. Then he chuckled to himself: "If Goiran were here and heard me, I'd be in for a full-dress lecture on free will …!"

"Now, then, mind what you're up to!" grumbled Uncle Dan. The spoon-feeding process had become more ticklish now that porridge had given place to prunes. The little boy's eyes kept on straying toward his mother, who was busy hanging out washing on the wire-netting round the chicken-yard. Now and then Daniel had to wait for quite a while, the spoon poised in mid-air, till Master Paul condescended to open his mouth again. But he showed no impatience.

Once Jenny had hung out her washing, she hastened to come to her brother's aid. Antoine watched her crossing the sunlit terrace a second time. She had taken off her apron and was pulling down her sleeves as she walked. Daniel waved away her offer of assistance. "No, don't bother. We've finished."

"What about our milk?" she gaily cried. "Hurry up! What will Uncle Antoine say if Paul hasn't drunk his milk?"

The child had already raised his arm to push away the cup; now he paused and glared at Antoine defiantly. He was evidently expecting to be lectured. But when, instead, he glimpsed a twinkle in Antoine's eye, a smile of humorous connivance, Paul hesitated, changed his mind. The little face lit up with mischievous delight and, gazing all the time at Antoine as if inviting him to admire this marvellous docility, the child drank off his cup of milk without more ado.

"Now, Paul, come along to bye-bye," Jenny said as she removed the bib and helped her son down from the chair. "Then Mummy can have her lunch in peace, with Uncle Dan and Uncle Antoine."

The two men were left to themselves. Daniel rose, walked over to the nearest plane tree, tore off a strip of bark, gazed at it listlessly, then crumbled it in his hand. Taking another piece of gum from his pocket, he began chewing again. Finally he went back to the easy-chair and once more stretched himself on it.

Antoine kept silent. He was thinking of Daniel, of the war, of that "mystical communion" of the men in the front trenches. He remembered a remark made to him at the Le Mousquier mess by young Lubin, who reminded him in so many ways of his former assistant, Manuel Roy: "You may say what you like, but war has a *glamour* all its own." There had been a break in the young man's voice and a far-away look in his eyes as he said this. Of course, Antoine reflected, Lubin was a youngster of twenty who had been shifted at a moment's notice from the lecture rooms of the Sorbonne into active service, pitchforked from playing fields into the front line. He had not yet made a start in life when he was caught by the war; he had no career to leave behind him. That was one reason why he could talk so airily about war and even find a "glamour" in it. But, Antoine mused, what does that "glamour" come to when one thinks of all the horrors that I've witnessed?

Into his mind a memory flashed of a certain night in early September—in the course of that long-drawn-out struggle which Antoine always thought of as "the fighting at Provins" but which the world knew as the Battle of the Marne—when he had had to move his first-aid station at a moment's notice, under a violent bombardment. After successfully evacuating the wounded he had managed to crawl, followed by his orderlies, along a trench to a somewhat less heavily shelled area, where there was a decapitated farmhouse whose thick walls and vaulted cellar seemed to offer temporary shelter. But just then the enemy guns had lengthened the range; shells came dropping nearer and nearer at every moment. The first thing Antoine had done was to send all his men down into the cellar and close the trap door on them. After that he had gone back to the entrance and stood leaning against the doorpost, waiting for a lull in the gunfire. It was then the thing had happened. There had come a shell-burst only thirty or forty yards away, making him stagger back into the living-room under a shower of bricks and plaster. And there, in the darkness, he had run into his men grouped together in the centre of the room. He guessed why they were there. Seeing that their officer disdained to join them in their "funk-hole," they had pushed up the trapdoor and of their own accord had lined up silently behind him.

"We were in a damned tight corner just then," Antoine reflected, "and I must admit this proof of my men's devotion, their loyalty, gave me a thrill of pleasure that I'll never forget. Yes, if some young fire-eater like Lubin had said to me that night: 'War has a glamour all its own,' I'd have agreed, likely as not."

Then, catching himself up angrily, he said: "No!"

Unwittingly he had spoken the word aloud. Daniel turned in surprise.

"What I meant to say …" he began; then, excusing himself with a smile, gave up attempting to explain, and fell silent.

From a window on the first floor came a sound of crying: little Paul protesting against being put to bed.

# Chapter VIII

JENNY had tucked the child up in his cot and was waiting for him to fall asleep. Meanwhile, as was her daily practice, she changed into her work-clothes so as to be able to go to the hospital immediately after lunch and take up her duties in the linen-room. Happening to pass one of the windows, she had a glimpse across the light tulle curtain of the two men conversing under the plane trees. Antoine's voice was too low-pitched to reach her, but Daniel's had sudden bursts of shrillness which, though she did not catch the words, were clearly audible.

Sadness fell on her as she remembered the two young men the way they once had been—active, robust, and cheerful, full of ambitious projects for the future. War had made them what they were today… . Still, they had come through it alive, anyhow. Their health would improve; Antoine would recover his voice, Daniel get used to his lameness. One day they would pick up again the broken threads of their careers. But for Jacques—all was ended. Ah, could he, too, have been alive this bright May morning, she would have left everything to follow him, to the ends of the earth if need be, and they would have brought up their son together! But no—all was over … for ever.

She could no longer hear Daniel's voice. Going up to the window, she saw Antoine walking toward the house. Since yesterday she had been seeking an opportunity of speaking to him alone. A glance at the baby told her he had fallen asleep; she rapidly did up her skirt and tidied up the room, then went to the door and held it open.

Antoine was climbing the stairs slowly, clinging to the banisters. When he looked up and saw her, she smiled and, laying a linger on her lips, went toward him. "He's asleep. Come and have a peep at him."

Too out of breath to reply, he followed her on tiptoe.

It was a very large room, and the Jouy wallpaper with a gay pictorial design in blue increased the effect of airiness. At the far end were two identical twin beds with the child's cot between them. This, Antoine conjectured, must have been the bedroom of M. and Mme. de Fontanin in the past. But he was puzzled by the fact that both of the full-sized beds were apparently in use; the bedside table next to each was strewn with miscellaneous toilet articles. Hung on the wall between the beds was a portrait of Jacques, life-sized and as arresting as a living presence. It was an oil painting in the modern style. Antoine had never seen it before.

Little Jean-Paul was sleeping, curled up between the sheets, one shoulder tucked under the bolster, his hair ruffled, the pink, moist lips a little parted. His free arm lay on the counterpane, but there was no slackness in its poise—the small fist was clenched like a boxer's.

Antoine pointed to the portrait, throwing a questioning glance at Jenny.

"I brought it back with me from Switzerland," she whispered. Her gaze settled on the picture, then sped back to the child. "Isn't it extraordinary, the likeness between them!"

"Ah, but you should have known Jacques when he was Paul's age… ." Yet, he reflected, it doesn't follow in the least that they'll resemble each other in character. This child's mental make-up must have countless elements which did not enter into that of Jacques. He followed up his thought aloud, in a low voice: "Isn't it strange to think of all the multitude of ancestors, near and remote, that have contributed their share to this little life? Which influences, one wonders, will predominate? Impossible to guess. Birth is a sort of miracle, bringing something unique into the world; all the elements that go to make up a human being may come from the past, but the way they're combined is always wholly new."

Abruptly, without opening his eyes or unclenching his fist, the child drew up his arm and crooked it over his face, as if to screen himself from their gaze. Antoine and Jenny glanced at each other, smiling.

Strange, too, he thought, as silently the two of them retreated to the far end of the room, how strange that of all the possibilities of different beings Jacques had within him, this one alone—this particular composite of elements that is Jean-Paul—and no other—should have fulfillled itself and been called into life!

Still keeping her voice rather low, Jenny asked: "What was Daniel, poor fellow, talking about to you just now? He seemed quite worked up."

"About the war. However much one tries to keep off it, one always comes back to that topic—worse luck!"

Jenny's face grew hard. "It's a subject about which I've given up talking … to Daniel."

"Really?"

"He's too fond of airing opinions which make me blush for him. Opinions he picks up from the nationalist newspapers. Jacques would never have allowed him to say such things in his presence."

What papers does *she* read, I wonder? Antoine thought. The *Humanité* most likely, in memory of Jacques.

Suddenly she drew closer to him. "On the evening of the day of mobilization—I can still see the place, just beside a sentry-box in front of the Chamber of Deputies—Jacques clutched my arm and said to me: 'Remember this, Jenny. As from today we'll have to divide people into two classes: those who tolerate the idea of war and those who abhor it!' "

For some moments she remained lost in thought; Jacques's words were echoing in her brain. Then with a stifled sigh she turned, walked to a writing-desk the flap of which was open, and sat down in front of it. She signed to Antoine to draw up a chair.

But he remained standing, looking at the portrait. It showed Jacques seated, gazing up toward the light, a hand splayed on his thigh. There was a certain bravado in the pose, but it was true to life; Jacques often used to sit in just that attitude. The lock of reddish hair made a vivid streak of colour across his forehead. (Antoine thought: When he's older, the child's hair will darken to that shade.) The deep-set eyes, the bitter droop of the large mouth, and the tautness of the chin gave the face a look of anguish almost painful in its intensity. The background had been left unfinished.

"It was painted in June 1914," Jenny explained, "by an Englishman named Paterson. I understand he's fighting now in the ranks of the Bolshevists. Vanheede had brought the picture to his place, and he presented it to me, in Geneva. Vanheede's that nice young Dutchman who was so devoted to Jacques. I think I mentioned him in my letters to you, didn't I?"

One memory leading to another, she gradually gave Antoine a full account of her experiences in Switzerland. She had never breathed a word of them to others and it was with evident pleasure that she unburdened her heart to Antoine. She described how Vanheede had led her to the Hotel du Globe and shown her Jacques's room. "It was a small, dark garret; the only window gave onto a landing." He had taken her to the Café Landolt, to Headquarters, and introduced her to the survivors of the Talking Shop group. Among them she had found Stefany, who had been on the *Humanité* staff in Jaurés's time; Jacques had introduced him to her in Paris. Stefany had succeeded in escaping to Switzerland, had started a paper there entitled *Their Great War*, and become one of the most active members of the Geneva group of diehard internationalists. "Vanheede came with me to Basel, too." Her eyes grew pensive.

Bending over the desk, she unlocked one of its drawers and with extreme precaution, as if handling a precious relic, took out a small bundle of manuscript. She held it for some moments in her hands before passing it to Antoine.

Greatly mystified, Antoine fell to examining the sheets, and at once something struck him about the handwriting.

> And yet here you are today, facing each other, with loaded rifles in your hands, ready blindly, at the first word of command, to slaughter men you've never seen, men whom you have no reason to hate… .

Suddenly he recognized it. What he had in his hands was Jacques's "*Message*," written shortly before his death. The sheets were crumpled, covered with erasures, smeared with printer's ink. The handwriting was undoubtedly Jacques's, though haste and fever had made it almost unrecognizable; in some places deeply scored and rugged, in others wavering as a child's.

> Has the French state, has the German state, the right to tear you away from your families and from your work and dispose of your lives against your most obvious personal interests, against your will, your convictions, your most human, most sacred and legitimate instincts? What gave them this appalling power over you, the power of life and death? Your ignorance. Your apathy.

Antoine looked up.

"It's the rough draft of the 'Message.' " Jenny's voice was tense with emotion. "Plattner gave it to me in Basel. He's the bookseller who saw to the printing of it. They'd kept the manuscript. They told me …"

" 'They'?" Whom do you mean?"

"Plattner and a young German called Kappel, who'd known Jacques. He's a doctor, and was awfully nice to me when I was having my baby. They showed me the horrible little room where Jacques lodged when he was writing that. And they went with me to the hilltop from which the plane took off." As she spoke, pictures were forming in her mind of her stay in the Swiss frontier town crowded with troops and foreigners and spies. While she described her experiences to Antoine, she seemed to see again Frau Stumpf's tumbledown house and the cell-like room which Jacques had occupied, with its narrow dormer window overlooking wharves and sidings black with coal-dust, the banks of the Rhine where he had walked, and the bridges guarded by troops. How vividly it came back to her, her journey to the plateau on the hilltop, in a decrepit vehicle driven by Andreyev—the same that Jacques had used on his last journey! Plattner's guttural voice still echoed in her ears. "Here's where we scrambled up the hillside. It was pitch-dark. Here we lay down to wait for daybreak. It was over there, in that notch between the hills, that we first sighted the plane. It landed over there, and Thibault climbed into it."

"I always wonder what were the thoughts that occupied his mind during those hours of waiting on the hilltop," she said in a low, brooding voice. "They tell me he walked away from the others and lay down on the ground some distance off. He must have had a presentiment of his death. What were his last thoughts? I shall never know."

Antoine, too, his eyes fixed on the portrait as he listened, was musing on that lonely vigil on the hilltop, the coming of the death-fraught plane, the fruitless sacrifice of his brother's life. What horrified him most, perhaps, was the tragic absurdity of such heroism, as of so many forms of heroism—of almost all, indeed. How many instances had he not seen in the war of deeds of valour, sublime but senseless! "Nearly always," he reflected, "it's an error of judgment that leads men to these acts of heroic folly—a blind belief in certain standards, certain views of life, as to which they've never stopped to ask themselves coolly, dispassionately: 'Are these views, these standards, worth the sacrifice of my life?' " The cult of energy and willpower was second nature with Antoine, yet he had an instinctive aversion for heroism, and four years of war had only intensified this aversion. He had not the least wish to belittle his brother's act; Jacques had died in the defence of his convictions, he had been true to himself up to the end, and such an end could inspire nothing but respect. Yet whenever Antoine pondered on Jacques's "ideas," he always came up against an inconsistency that riddled them through and through. How could Jacques, hating as he did all forms of violence, both temperamentally and intellectually —the fact that he had deliberately risked his life in fighting against violence, in preaching fraternization and sabotage of the war, was proof of this—how could Jacques have been for years a militant advocate of the social revolution, in other words an advocate of the most brutal form of violence, the scientific, cold-blooded, merciless ferocity of the doctrinaire? He could not bring himself to believe that Jacques was so na'ive, or so ignorant of human nature, as to imagine that the "total revolution" he had staked his hopes on could take place without involving the most shocking cruelty and injustice, a hecatomb of countless innocent victims.

As he wandered back from the perplexing face delineated in the portrait, his gaze settled again on Jenny, who was continuing her narrative. Her tone was calm, but her face seemed transfigured, illumined by a secret, boundless exaltation.

After all, he asked himself, what have I made of my own life? What right have I to sit in judgment on others whose faith impels them to extremist acts, men who are bold enough to attempt the impossible?

"One of the things that distress me most," Jenny went on after a short pause, "is the thought that he never knew I was going to have a child." As she spoke she gathered up the sheets and put them back in the drawer. Again she fell silent; then, as if she were thinking aloud—Antoine was deeply touched by this proof of her perfect trust in him—she murmured: "You know, I'm ever so glad my little Paul was born in Basel, the city where his father spent his last days on earth, where he must have lived through the most intensely crowded hours of his whole existence."

Whenever she evoked the memory of Jacques, the blue eyes darkened, a slight flush rose to her cheeks, and a strange expression settled for a moment on her face—a look of ardent, insatiable yearning. Her love, Antoine thought, has left its stamp on her for ever;

and somehow, though he could not account for it, the thought vexed him. He could not help feeling that this love was rooted in absurdity. Between two people so patently unsuited to each other as Jacques and Jenny, it could only have arisen from a mutual misapprehension. A misapprehension which, had Jacques lived, would probably have yielded to experience, but, as things were, was shrined in memory, irrefragable. The way she spoke about him made this clear. … For it was one of Antoine's pet theories that such extreme devotion is always based on misunderstanding, defect of judgment, a sentimental fallacy. But for the false idea each has of the other, it would be impossible for lovers to keep up their mutual adoration.

"My task," she said, "is none too easy; it's to shape Jean-Paul into the son Jacques would have wished for. Sometimes that task almost terrifies me." She looked up; a gleam of pride shone in her eyes, as if she were thinking: "But I've confidence in myself." Aloud she said: "But I've confidence in our son."

It was a joy to him to find her so courageous in her outlook on the future. From the tone of some of her letters he had expected to find her less sure of herself, less qualified for her task. Now he saw how effectively she had resisted the dark allurements of despair. Too often had he seen bereaved women nursing their grief with morbid assiduity, so as to sublimate their stricken love in their own eyes and the world's. Jenny had done nothing of the sort; she had shaken off these morbid impulses, faced the situation, and reorganized her life on healthy lines. He could not refrain from voicing his appreciation. "And by acting thus, you showed the stuff that you are made of," he concluded.

She had heard him out in silence. Quite unaffectedly, she replied: "I don't deserve any credit, really. What made things easier, I imagine, was that Jacques and I had never really lived together. His death made no change in the course of my daily life. That helped me through the first period. Then the baby came-—but even before he was born, his presence was a tremendous help. I had something to live for: to bring up Jacques's child and mine." Again she paused before continuing. "It's no easy task, I assure you. Small though he is, Paul has a mind of his own and he's difficult to handle. Sometimes, you know, he frightens me… ." She cast him a keen, almost suspicious glance. "But I suppose Daniel's been talking to you about him?"

"About Paul? No, hardly at all."

Antoine guessed that brother and sister did not agree in their views as to the child's character, and that this difference of opinion had led to a certain estrangement.

"Daniel insists that Paul *enjoys* being disobedient. That's unkind—and untrue. The matter's much more complicated than that. I've thought over it, deeply. It's true that instinctively the child says 'No.' But it's not bad will on his part; it's a need he feels for standing up for himself. Asserting himself, if you prefer. As if he wanted to prove to himself that he exists. And it's so obviously the outcome of a natural impulse, something innate and irresistible, that one can't be angry with him. It's an instinct with him, like the instinct of self-preservation. And so, oftener than not, I can't bring myself to punish him when he's been naughty. You see what I mean, don't you?"

Antoine nodded, and his look invited her to continue. He was slightly amused by her extreme earnestness, but deeply interested.

"I knew you'd understand," she said with a smile, reassured by his approval. "Of course you're used to children, and I don't suppose that sort of thing surprises you. Personally, I always feel I'm up against a mystery—in that strange unruliness of his. Yes, often I watch my son disobeying me, with a sort of amazement, of apprehension, I could almost say 'of awe'; the same feelings as I have in watching him grow up, develop, get to understand things. If he has a spill when he's by himself in the garden, he cries; but I've very rarely seen him cry, however much he's hurt himself, if any of us are in sight. If I offer him a sweet, he'll refuse it, for no apparent reason; but when my back is turned, he'll come and steal the box. Not out of greediness; he won't even try to open it. He'll go and hide it under the cushions on a sofa or bury it in his sand-pile. Why? With the simple object, I suppose, of proving his *independence*. When I scold him, he doesn't say a word, but all his little muscles stiffen up, his eyes change colour and their expression grows so hard I daren't go on scolding him. Somehow I can't stand out against that look—it's hard as steel, but pure as well … and, oh, so lonely! I suppose Jacques had that look, when he was tiny… ."

"So perhaps had you, Jenny!" Antoine smiled.

She waved away the suggestion and went on at once: "But there's this, too: if he flares up at the least constraint, he's equally responsive to the least show of affection. If when he's in the sulks, I can tempt him into my arms, he snuggles up at once, kisses me, and starts laughing. It's as if there was something hard inside him that had all of a sudden gone soft, melted. As if he'd cast out an evil spirit that possessed him."

"I expect he's even more disobedient with Gise, isn't he?"

"It's not the same thing!" A certain stiffness had come into her tone. "When 'Auntie Gi' is about, nothing else counts for him. He's crazy about her!"

"Can she get him to do what she wants?"

"Even less than I or Daniel. He'd like to have her with him all the time, but that's because she bows to all his whims. And the services he gets out of her are usually those he'd be too proud to ask of anyone else: unbuttoning his trousers, for instance, or fetching some object that he's too small to reach. And if I'm not there, never once does he say 'Thank you' to her. You should hear the way he orders her about! One would almost think …" She hesitated for a moment. "It's not very nice for Gise, what I'm going to say, but I believe it's true; yes, one would almost think he'd sensed the slave blood in her."

This last remark took Antoine by surprise and he threw her a questioning glance. But Jenny would not meet his gaze. The lunch bell had just begun to ring; she rose from her chair.

They walked together to the door. Jenny seemed to have something still to say; she placed her hand on the knob, then withdrew it. "This talk has done me ever so much good," she said in a low tone. "I've had nobody to talk to about Jacques since I got back from Switzerland."

"What about Gise?" Antoine remembered the regrets Gise had expressed on this very subject when unburdening her heart to him.

Jenny was leaning against the doorjamb, with lowered eyes; she seemed not to have heard. After some moments she repeated: "What about Gise?" as if the words had only just sunk in.

"Gise is the only person who could understand you. She loved Jacques. And she, too, is suffering—terribly."

Without looking up, Jenny shook her head. It seemed as if she was determined to withhold any explanation. Then, raising her eyes to Antoine, she said with a harshness that took him by surprise: "Gise? She has her rosary. It keeps her fingers busy and it helps her

not to think." She lowered her eyes again and, after a short pause, remarked: "Sometimes I envy her!" But her tone and a sound in her throat like a suppressed laugh belied the words. She seemed, indeed, to repent of them at once. In a gentler voice and with obvious sincerity she added: "I've come to regard Gise as a true friend. Whenever I think about our future, she has a big share in it. And it's a sort of consolation to me to think that doubtless we shall always have her with us."

Antoine waited for a "But …" It came, though after a moment's hesitation. "But Gise is … as she is, you know. One must take people as they are. Gise has splendid qualities; she has her failings, too." Again she hesitated. "For instance, Gise isn't quite straightforward."

Antoine's immediate reaction was a protesting exclamation: "Gise not straightforward—with her candid eyes!" But on second thought he fancied he had guessed what Jenny meant. Without being actually insincere, Gise tended to be secretive. She avoided stating her likes and dislikes, shirked explanations, had a knack of hiding her antipathies and treating those she least cared for with smiling friendliness. Was it due to shyness, or modesty, or cunning? he wondered. Or was it not, more probably, the instinctive double-dealing of those black races some drops of whose "slave blood" flowed in her veins: the self-defensive reflex of peoples long inured to servitude? He caught himself up at once.

"Yes, I see what you mean."

"Then you see why, fond of her though I am and intimate as we are in our daily lives—well, there are some subjects I can't talk to her about." She drew herself up. "No, it's out of the question."

Then quickly, as if to cut short the conversation, she opened the door. "Let's go down to lunch."

# Chapter IX

LUNCH was served in the open air under the kitchen porch.

It was a rapid meal. Jenny had little appetite, and Antoine, who had not had time for his treatment that morning, found difficulty in swallowing. Only Daniel did justice to Clotilde's excellent veal cutlets and green peas. But he seemed bored and listless, and made no effort to talk. Only at the end of the meal did he come out of his shell. Antoine had just indulged in some comments on Rumelles and his kind, the "Back Areas Brigade," and Daniel promptly launched forth into a truculent defence of the profiteers, "the only men who took a common sense view of the war." By way of illustration he cited the case of his former employer, Ludwigson, "that inspired crook," and in a tone of burlesque admiration described how he had dashed across to London at the outbreak of the war and, rumour had it, multiplied his capital a dozen times by founding, in cooperation with a group of City magnates and British politicians, the concern known as Allied Oilfields Ltd.

Antoine was gazing at Jenny, struck by the change that had come over her appearance in the last four years. Later on, he thought, she'll be the very image of her mother. Maternity and its obligations had filled out her hips and bosom, thickened the lower portion of her neck. But the change, to Antoine's mind, was all to her advantage; it had brought some relaxation to the "Protestant stiffness" (as he inwardly described it) in her general bearing, the poise of her head, the rather angular grace of the delicately moulded features. The expression of her eyes, however, had not changed; they still had that far-away look—of loneliness, serene courage and melancholy—which had so greatly impressed Antoine on the first occasion when he saw Jenny, then a mere child, at the dme of his brother's escapade with Daniel. "And yet," he reflected, "she seems much more at peace with herself now than in the past. … I never could make out why Jacques was so attracted by her. She used to be so unapproachable, so 'prickly,' what with her pride and shyness and stand-offishness. An iceberg! Now, anyhow, she doesn't give one tha't impression of having to make a superhuman effort to talk to one about herself. This morning she seemed positively eager to unburden herself to me. Just perfect she was this morning. Still, she'll never have her mother's charm and graciousness of manner. No, there'll always be something in her attitude that seems to say: 'I'd rather not be noticed. I don't care if people like me or not. I'm sufficient to myself.' Well, well, it takes all sorts to make a world. She'll never be my type. But I must say she has vastly improved… ."

It had been settled that, immediately after luncheon, Antoine was to go with Jenny to the hospital and call on *Mme.* de Fontanin.

While Daniel settled down again on his long chair, Jenny ran upstairs to get little Paul out of bed. Antoine seized this opportunity to go to his room and take a hasty inhalation, for he foresaw a tiring day.

Jenny usually cycled to and from her work. Taking her bicycle with her for the return journey, she set off on foot across the park with Antoine.

"Daniel seems greatly changed," Antoine remarked as they were entering the avenue. "Has he really given up working?"

"Oh, yes, completely."

Her tone was one of reprobation. Several times in the course of the morning and during lunch, Antoine had noticed indications that brother and sister were not on the best of terms. This had surprised him, for he remembered how in the past Daniel had been all attention for Jenny, the kindest of brothers. And he wondered if, in this respect too, Daniel was not growing remiss.

They walked in silence for a few minutes. The young leafage of the limes spread the avenue with soft green shadows dappled with gleams of sunlight, and the windless air was close and oppressive, as if rain were threatening, though the sky was cloudless.

Antoine raised his head and sniffed. "Smell it?" he asked.

The air was laden with the fragrance of a clump of lilacs in a garden by which they were passing. But Jenny paid no heed to the lilacs.

"He might make himself quite useful at the hospital, if he chose to. Mamma is always asking him to help. But he says that, with his wooden leg, he's not up to work of any kind." She changed hands on the handle-bars, so as to come nearer Antoine. "The truth is, he's never felt like doing much for others. And less than ever now."

He thought: She's unfair to her brother. Anyhow, she should be grateful to him for looking after the child.

There was a pause. Suddenly she declared in an almost strident voice: "Daniel has never had any sense of his duties to society."

The remark took Antoine by surprise. Then he thought with annoyance: She refers everything back to Jacques. And it's by Jacques's standards she's judging her brother now.

"Personally," he said in a low, sad voice, "I think a man's to be pitied when he feels that he is only a shadow of his former self."

But she had only Daniel in mind. "He might quite easily have been killed!" she exclaimed callously. "What's he got to complain about? He came through it with his skin!" With unthinking cruelty she added: "Why does he make all that fuss about his leg? What's a slight limp? Anyhow, it wouldn't prevent him from helping Mother with her accounts at the hospital. Or, supposing he has no desire to be of service to the community" (That's another expression she's picked up from Jacques, Antoine thought to himself) "what's to prevent him starting painting again? No, the truth is there's something else; it isn't just a matter of health with him, it's something in his character." In her excitement she had been gradually forcing the pace, and Antoine was getting out of breath. Noticing this, she slowed down at once. "Life had always been too easy for Daniel, I'm afraid. He'd always had everything his own way. And what makes him so depressed these days is wounded vanity—nothing more. He never stirs outside the garden, never goes to Paris. Why? Because he's ashamed of being seen in his present condition. He can't reconcile himself to the idea that his day is over, that he can no longer lead the life of a young man-about-town—the weak and filthy life he was leading before the war."

"You're terribly severe, Jenny!"

She threw a quick glance at Antoine. He was smiling. She waited for the smile to die away before speaking again.

"You see, I'm afraid—for my son." There was a vicious edge to her voice.

"For Paul?"

"Yes. Jacques made me understand … oh, heaps of things! And now I feel half stifled in my present surroundings; I'm not at home here any more. And I can't bear the idea that little Paul will have to grow up in this tainted atmosphere."

Antoine made a vague gesture as if he had not quite understood.

"I'm telling you all this," she said, "because I trust you. Because I shall need your advice later on. I've a very deep affection for Mamma. I respect her courage and her fine attitude to life. Nor can I forget all she has done for me. But—there's no help for it; we haven't a single idea in common. I admit I'm very different from what I was in 1914. But Mamma, too, has changed tremendously. As you know, she's been in charge of her hospital for the last four years. For those four years she has been organizing, making decisions, giving orders right and left, and she's got used to being obeyed, looked up to. She's come to like authority. She—well, she's become quite different, I assure you."

Antoine's expression betrayed a certain incredulity.

"Mamma used to be so easy-going," Jenny went on. "Of course she was always very religious, but she never tried to force her views on anybody. But nowadays—well, if you could hear her lecturing her patients! And it's always the men who play up to her most who get the longest sick-leave."

"You're terribly severe," Antoine said again. "And, I suspect, unjust."

"Perhaps! Yes, I dare say you're right. I suppose I oughtn't to be telling you all this. I wonder how I can make you understand what I mean. Here's an example. Mamma always says 'our brave boys' and 'the Huns.' "

"So does everyone else."

"No, not in quite that way. All the crimes that have been committed during the last years in the name of patriotism, Mamma condones them. She actually approves of them. She's convinced that justice and decency are exclusively on the Allies' side; that the war must go on till Germany is crushed out of existence; that those who don't think as she does are traitors to their country; and that those who ascribe the war to its true causes and see that capitalism's at the root of everything that's happened are …"

He listened in amazement: these revelations of Jenny's present state of mind, her outlook on life, and the new scale of values she had taken over wholesale from Jacques interested Antoine far more deeply than the changes which had come over *Mme.* de Fontanin's character. He felt inclined to say, in his turn: "I'm afraid—for little Paul!" For, though convinced that Jenny's "conversion" to these views was mainly on the surface and factitious, he could not help anxiously wondering if it might not expose his little nephew to a dangerous atmosphere; more dangerous, in any case, for the formation of a growing mind than the example of "Uncle Dan's" laziness or the grandmother's narrow patriotism.

They were entering an open space where several roads met; beyond a stretch of sunlight, the entrance-gates of the Thibaults' country house were coming into view. Antoine's attention wandered from his companion to the scene before him; he had the impression of revisiting a place known to him in an infinitely far-off past, a previous existence.

Yet everything had remained immutably the same: the broad vista of the avenue, flanked by grassy riding-tracks and abutting on the stately frontage of the chateau; the little square, ringed with white railings, the round pool in its midst, the fountain that played on Sundays only, the trim box-bordered lawns. And in the distance he discerned, half hidden by the low branches of the trees in his father's garden, the tradesmen's entrance where Gise, as a little girl, had used to stand, watching for him to come home. Here anyhow, it seemed, the war had left no mark.

Before crossing the square Jenny halted.

"For three years Mamma has been living in daily contact with the beastliness of war. And one would think she'd lost the capacity for pity, that all her decent feelings have been blunted by the degrading occupation she has taken up."

"By hospital work, you mean?"

"No." Her voice was stern. "By the occupation which consists in nursing young men back to health with the sole object of enabling them to return to duty and be killed. Like the wretched horses used by the picadors in bull-fights that are sewn up and sent back again and again into the bull-ring." She stared at the ground, then suddenly, in a belated access of shyness, asked: "Do I shock you?"

"No!"

Antoine was himself taken aback by the promptness of this "No!"; it was a discovery to him to recognize that he was far more in sympathy with the outspoken indignation of a girl like Jenny than with the patriotism of a *Mme.* de Fontanin. And, thinking of his brother, he told himself yet once again: "How much better I could appreciate him now than in the past!"

They had reached the gate. Jenny sighed, regretful that their walk was over, and turned to him with an affectionate smile. "Thank you. It's so nice, for once in a way, to be able to speak one's heart out."

# Chapter X

THE massive iron gates stood open. The gilding of their showy monogram "O.T." was hardly tarnished at all, but the drive was in a sorry state. The wheels of ambulances had scored deep ruts, and not a trace was left of the fine gravel that M. Thibault used to have raked and rolled out daily when he was in residence. Most of the windows, too, stood open, shaded by brand-new red-striped awnings that made a brave display of colour -behind the leafage.

They came to the old stables. "It's here," Jenny said, "the linen-store where I 'do my bit,' as Mamma would say. I'll have to leave you now. Her office is the first door on the right, after crossing the veranda."

Left to himself, he paused for some moments to take breath. And as his gaze lingered on the scene before him, each shrub, each winding garden-path lit up a facet of the past. By fits and starts there came to him the tinkle of a piano, and a picture formed before his eyes of Gise, perched on a high stool, her pigtail dangling, practising scales under the dual control of old Mademoiselle and a loudly ticking metronome.

Beyond the shrubbery, in front of the house, was an animated scene: a number of young men in grey flannels and forage-caps were seated in tiers on the front steps, basking in the sun and chattering to each other; others, seated round garden-tables, were playing cards or reading the papers. Two privates, coatless, in blue breeches and puttees, were mowing the lawn; Antoine recognized as a bugbear of his youth the nerve-racking din of his father's old lawn-mower. Farther off, half a dozen convalescents had installed the old quoits set under the beech tree; the air rang with the jingle of quoits hitting the metal hob.

The men sprawling on the steps rose to their feet and saluted as Antoine approached and made his way between them. The veranda had been enclosed with windows on all sides, to form a solarium, and the air was warm and stuffy as in a hothouse. It was used as a recreation-room by patients who were not yet fit enough to venture out of doors. On the left was the piano—the selfsame yellowish-brown piano that Gise had learned on as a child. A soldier was seated at it, picking out with an unprenticed finger the tune of "La Madelon."

The piano fell silent, hands rose to foreheads to salute the passing officer. Antoine entered what had been the drawing-room; it was empty at this hour and had the look of a hotel lounge, with four card-tables well in view and chairs of all shapes and sizes grouped round them.

The door of M. Thibault's study was closed. A card affixed to it with drawing-pins bore the inscription: *Staff*. There seemed at first sight to be nobody in the room. The furniture had not been changed; the big oak table, armchair, and bookcases lorded it in the old familiar places. However, the far end of the study had been screened off. At the sound of the opening door a typewriter stopped clicking and a youngster's head peeped over the screen. No sooner had he set eyes on the visitor than he gave a joyful exclamation. "Oh, sir! It's nice to see you, sir!"

Antoine smiled uncertainly; he could make nothing of this greeting. Then he decided that this tall young man, whose face seemed totally unfamiliar, must be Eddie, the younger of the two orphan boys who used to live together in the Rue de Verneuil, the child on whom he had operated years ago for a boil on the arm. When leaving Paris at the beginning of the war he had asked Clotilde and Adrienne to keep an eye on the youngsters, and he had a vague impression of having been told that Mme. de Fontanin had taken them on her staff at the hospital.

"By Jove, you *have* shot up!" he exclaimed. "How old exactly are you now?"

"Just turned eighteen, sir."

"And what's your job here?"

"I started off as post orderly. Now I'm typist."

"Where's your brother?"

"On the Champagne front, sir. He was wounded last April—didn't you know about it? In the hand. Near Fismes, it happened. He'd joined up in 1916. They had to take off those two fingers. Lucky it's the left hand, isn't it?"

"And he's gone back to the front? How's that?"

"Oh, there ain't no flies on Robbie! He got himself assigned to the Weather Bureau. He's having a soft time now—no risks and easy work." Eddie gazed at Antoine with pitying curiosity. "You were gassed, sir, weren't you?"

"Yes." Noticing a small armchair, upholstered in red velvet and garnished with gilt studs, that recalled to him his childhood, he sank into it wearily.

"Filthy stuff, gas!" Eddie remarked, wrinkling his nose. "It didn't ought to be allowed, it's like hitting below the belt. I can't think …"

"Isn't Mme. de Fontanin here today?" Antoine cut in.

"She's upstairs. I'll let her know you've come, sir. We're expecting a new batch today, and extra beds are being fixed up."

Antoine sat on alone … alone with his Father. For the strong personality of M. Thibault seemed still to dominate the room. It emanated from everything, from the very place allotted to each object as easiest of access—from the silver-topped inkpot, from the desk-lamp, the hand-blotter, the penwiper, and the barometer hanging on the wall. So tenacious was that personality that the shifting of an article of furniture to a new place or the addition of a screen could not dispel an atom of it. It remained firmly rooted in this room, where for half a century it had wielded uncontested sway. Antoine had only to glance at that tall door of imitation oak to hear in his mind's ear the creak it used to make opening and closing—a curiously unforgettable sound like a subdued grunt, malevolent and derisive. He had only to look at the worn strip on the carpet to see at once his father stumping to and fro between the bookcase and the fireplace, his coat-tails flapping, his big, puffy hands locked behind him on his buttocks. And it was enough to gaze for a moment at the copy of Bonnat's *Christ* hung on the wall and, beneath it, the big desk-chair with his father's initials stamped on its leather back —in a flash he had resuscitated M. Thibault's burly form solidly ensconced in it, his shoulders hunched forward. He seemed to see his father perking up his small, pointed beard toward some unwanted caller; then, before speaking, taking off his pince-nez and, with measured movements that brought to mind a man crossing himself, lowering his arm and bestowing the glasses in a vest pocket.

The click of the door-latch brought him to his feet. Mme. de Fontanin had come. She was in the same uniform as her assistants, except that her hair, which had gone quite white, was uncovered. Her cheeks were pale and wasted. A thought came, unbidden, to Antoine's mind. "That's a cardiac complexion; I don't give her long to live."

She clasped both Antoine's hands and had him sit down, then settled into the big monogrammed chair at the far end of the table. Obviously, Antoine judged, this was "the Huguenot's" usual place. ("If the old master could come back …!" as Clotilde would say!)

She led off the conversation with an inquiry about his health. The short wait had rested him, and he smiled. "If I'd had to stay out there, it would all have been over months ago. I'm pulling through. Luckily I've a sound constitution."

He went on to ask about the hospital, how she was faring in her new life. She grew animated at once.

"It's been a great success—but the credit isn't due to me. I've such a splendid staff. Nicole is in charge. She's a fully certified nurse, you know, and the dear girl has been such a wonderful help. Yes; I couldn't wish for better helpers. They're girls and young married women living here at Maisons, so all my rooms are free for patients. And, as they're voluntary helpers, I can keep within my budget, though the government allowance is wretchedly small. But everybody's been so generous, from the very first day. The local people are kindness itself. Just think! All the beds and bedding, crockery and linen, are supplied by residents at Maisons. Today, for instance, we're expecting a new batch of patients. Well, Gise and Nicole have just gone out to collect the extra bedding, and I'm certain they'll have no difficulty in getting all we need." Her upward gaze, her radiant smile, aglow with trust and gratitude, seemed rendering thanks to the All-Highest for having peopled the world, and in particular Maisons-Laffitte, with helpful souls and hearts of gold.

She described in detail the changes which had been made in the house and those she had in mind for the future. The idea that the war might end some day, and with it her career as matron of a hospital, did not seem to cross her mind. Cheerfully she bade him: "Come and see!"

All indeed was changed. The billiard-room had become a first-aid room, the kitchen a consulting-room, the bathroom a surgical dressing-room. The greenhouse had been fitted with heating and converted into a ward with ample space for the twelve beds installed in it.

"Let's go upstairs now."

Each of the bedrooms, empty at this hour, served as a miniature sick-ward. Fifteen patients were housed on the first floor, ten on the second, and there were half a dozen emergency beds available in the attics.

Antoine was seized by a desire to have a look at his old bedroom, but the door was locked. It was due to be visited by the disinfecting staff; the room had been occupied by a paratyphoid case, and the man had just been transferred to the Saint-Germain hospital.

Mme. de Fontanin went from room to room, flinging doors open with the air of one in high authority, casting a keen, inspectorial glance at everything, checking, as she passed, the temperature of the radiators, the cleanliness of the basins, even the titles of the books and magazines lying on the tables. Now and then she raised her arm and read the time on her wristwatch; this gesture had evidently become an unconscious habit of hers.

Antoine followed, a little out of breath with all this walking; Clotilde's exclamation was still echoing in his mind: "If the old master could come back …!"

They were on the second floor. As Mme. de Fontanin was showing him into a large room with a gay, flowered wallpaper and a window opening on the high branches of two chestnut trees, a rush of memories swept over him and he halted on the threshold.

"Jacques's bedroom!"

Suddenly his eyes filled with tears. Mme. de Fontanin stared at him in surprise, then tactfully walked over to the window and shut it. It seemed that this unlooked-for incursion of the past had given her the desire for a more intimate conversation with him.

"Now," she said, "I'll take you to the stables—that's where I've set up my G.H.Q.—and we can have a quiet talk."

They went down the stairs in silence. To avoid having to walk across the veranda, they entered the garden by the back door. In the shade four men were putting a coat of white paint on some iron bedsteads. Mme. de Fontanin went up to them.

"Hurry up, boys! That paint has got to be dry by tomorrow morning… . What are you up to, Roblet? Come down at once!" Mounted on the scullery roof a man was fastening to the wall the branches of a clematis. "The day before yesterday you were in bed and today you're climbing ladders! I never heard of such a thing!" The culprit, a bearded young man, belonging, Antoine guessed, to a territorial regiment, grinned sheepishly but complied at once. As soon as he was on the ground she went up to him, undid two buttons of his coat, and felt his ribs. "Just as I expected. Your bandage has come loose. Go to the infirmary and have it seen to." She called Antoine to witness. "Just think! A lad who had an operation less than three weeks ago!"

As they walked round the lawn on their way to the stables, the men they passed gave friendly glances to Mme. de Fontanin and raised their forage-caps civilian-wise.

"My room's upstairs," she said as she opened the door.

The ground floor, where the stabling had been, was occupied by carpenters' benches, and the floor was strewn with shavings.

"The boys call this their workshop," she exclaimed as she led the way up the narrow corkscrew staircase leading to what had been the coachman's quarters. "I never have to send out to get jobs done nowadays. The boys do all my repairs—plumbing, carpentry, electric fittings, and so on."

There were two rooms on the upper floor, one of which she had converted into a little private office. Into this she now showed Antoine. The furniture consisted of two garden-chairs and a table, stacked with files and ledgers. A threadbare mat lay on the tiled floor. The moment he entered, Antoine recognized the lamp standing on the table; it was *his* lamp—the old pot-bellied oil-lamp with a green cardboard shade under which, on so many a hot summer night loud with the hum of moths, he had read himself tired, preparing for examinations.

On one of the newly whitewashed walls was pinned a group of photographs: a portrait of Jerome as a young man, willowy and elegant, resting a languid arm on the back of an armchair; one of Daniel as a small boy in an English sailor-suit; a snapshot of Jenny with her hair flowing over her shoulders, a tame pigeon perched on her outstretched wrist; and another of her, much more recent, in mourning, with her baby on her knees.

A fit of coughing compelled Antoine to sit down brusquely without waiting to be asked. When he looked up, he saw Mme. de Fontanin gazing earnestly at him, but she made no comment on his health.

"I'll take this chance of getting on a bit with my mending, if you don't mind." There was a hint of coquetry in the laugh accompanying the remark. "I've hardly ever time these days to do a stitch." She pushed aside a black Bible lying on the table to make-place for her work-basket. After another glance at her wristwatch she sat down.

"Has Daniel talked to you about himself at all? Did he let you have a look at his leg? I suppose not." She stifled a sigh. Daniel had never let her see his mutilated limb.

"No. But he's told me all his troubles. I advised him to try a course of graduated exercises. They can do wonders if one has a little perseverance. Anyhow, he admits himself that he can walk with hardly any difficulty now that he has this new artificial limb."

She did not seem to have heard. Her hands resting on her lap, her face turned to the window, she was gazing pensively at the sunlit foliage of the garden. Suddenly she swung round. "Has he told you what happened here on the day that he was wounded?"

"No. What was it?"

"God in His mercy forewarned me," she said gravely. "At the very instant when Daniel was wounded I had a message from Above." Her hand rose slowly and she paused, thrilled by the memory of that strange experience. When she continued speaking, it was with a certain solemnity, despite the studied simplicity of her tone—the voice she would have used when quoting a passage from the Scriptures; evidently she saw it as a sacred duty to make known to all the miracle that had befallen her.

"It was a Thursday. I woke up suddenly at daybreak. I felt God's presence near, and I tried to pray. But a sudden fit of faintness came over me; it was the first time since the hospital started that I'd been ill, and I haven't had a moment's illness since. I tried to open my window to call one of the night nurses. But I couldn't keep on my feet. Luckily, as I didn't put in an appearance at the usual hour, one of the nurses came to see what was the matter. She found me in bed, incapable of moving. Whenever I tried to rise, I went quite dizzy and sank back onto the pillow. I felt as if all my blood had flowed away through a wound and I had no strength left. And all the time Daniel was in my thoughts. I prayed to God. But I got worse and worse as the morning went on. Jenny brought the doctor to visit me several times. They gave me ether. I could hardly speak. At last, at half-past eleven, just after the first lunch bell had rung, I gave a sudden, involuntary cry and fainted. I came back to consciousness almost at once, and felt better. So much so that by the end of the afternoon I was strong enough to get up and go down to the office, sign the sick-lists, and attend to the mail. … I was all right again."

She had spoken in a level, somewhat restrained tone. She made a short pause before continuing.

"Well, Antoine, it was that Thursday at daybreak that Daniel's regiment got the order to attack. All that morning my dear boy fought like a hero without being wounded once. But a few minutes after half-past eleven a shell-splinter struck his thigh and shattered it. He was carried to the first-aid station, and from there an ambulance took him to the field hospital, where his leg was amputated some hours later. His life was saved." She slowly nodded several times, looking at him fixedly. "Needless to say, I knew nothing of all that till ten days later."

Antoine said nothing. What, indeed, could he have said? Her experience, it struck him, was of the same order as the apparently miraculous cure effected by Pastor Gregory when Jenny in early youth was dying, as it seemed, of meningitis. And he recalled one of Dr. Philip's remarks: "People always have the experiences they deserve."

Mme. de Fontanin had picked up her needlework and was silent for some moments. But before beginning to sew she pointed with the spectacles she had just taken from their case to the photograph of Jenny and her baby son.

"You haven't told me yet what your impression is of our little one."

"A splendid little fellow!"

"Isn't he!" she exclaimed proudly. "Daniel brings him here occasionally, on Sundays. And each time I see him he seems more developed, more robust. Daniel's always complaining about his disobedience and wilfulness. But need we be surprised if the child has a mind of his own? That's how a growing boy should be—strong-willed, bubbling over with energy. You, I'm sure," she added with a twinkle in her eye, "won't say No to that! It's a trial for me, seeing him so seldom. But, of course, he needs me less than my patients do… ." And, like a stream that after a brief deflection resumes its natural course, she went on talking about her hospital.

He nodded approval now and then, but, fearing to bring on his cough, refrained from speech. With her spectacles she looked an old woman. And again it struck him: "That's a cardiac complexion." Sitting very straight in her chair, plying her needle without haste, she cut a queenly figure, but with a redeeming touch of homeliness, as she expounded to him the administrative methods she had introduced and the thousand and one responsibilities devolving on her.

"It's an ill wind …" Antoine mused. "This war has proved a godsend to women of her type: an opportunity for public service, for making themselves useful, and at the same time giving a run to their domineering instincts, in an atmosphere of gratitude and admiration."

And he almost fancied she had guessed his thoughts when she remarked: "Oh, I'm not complaining of my task. It's terribly exacting, but I couldn't live without it now. I can't imagine myself going back to the life I led before the war. No, I can't be happy nowadays unless I feel that I'm being useful." She smiled. "I've an idea! Later on, you must start a private hospital for your—patientsand put me in charge of it as matron." At once she added: "With Nicole and Gisele on the staff, of course. And perhaps Jenny, too… . Why not?"

Complaisantly he echoed: "Why not, indeed?"

There was a short pause before she spoke again. "Yes, Jenny, too, will need an occupation in life." She sighed; then, without trying to convey the association of ideas behind the words, went on: "Poor Jacques! I'll never forget that last time I saw him."

Again she fell silent. Her return journey from Vienna just after mobilization began had come back to her mind. But she had a happy knack of promptly effacing disagreeable memories. Raising her hand, she pushed back a wisp of snow-white hair that had fallen across her forehead. However, she was determined to discuss with Antoine certain matters she had at heart.

"We must trust in the wisdom of Divine Providence," she began in that amiably authoritative tone of hers which implied that she was not to be interrupted. "We must accept the events that God has surely willed. Your brother's death was one of those events." She meditated for a while before pronouncing judgment. "Yes, inevitably their love would have brought them'—both of them alike—nothing but unhappiness… . You must forgive me for talking like this."

"I entirely agree with you," Antoine put in promptly. "If Jacques had lived, their life together would have been … impossible!"

She cast him an approving glance, nodded slowly several times, and resumed her sewing. After another pause, she spoke again in the same tone. “I won’t conceal from you, Antoine, that I was terribly distressed by … all that. And the day I learned my Jenny was going to have a baby …” She paused.

He had often thought of her in that connexion. And, noticing her eyes intent on him, he indicated by a slight flutter of the eyelids how fully he understood her feelings.

“Oh,” she exclaimed at once, fearing he might have failed to catch her meaning, “it wasn’t because of the … the irregularity of her motherhood. No, not so much on that account. What horrified me most of all was the thought that this dreadful affair was to leave an aftereffect, a perpetual reminder, in our lives. I can talk to you quite frankly, can’t I? I said to myself: ‘There’s Jenny’s future ruined beyond redress. It’s a judgment on us both… . So be it!’ Well, Antoine, I was wrong; I was lacking in faith. God moves in a mysterious way. His purpose is hidden from us, and His mercy infinite. What I had taken for a trial, a punishment, has proved, on the contrary, a blessing from Above. A sign of pardon. A source of happiness. And why, when all is said and done, should God have punished usp Was it not known to Him, still better than to us, that evil had played no part in their lapse, that the hearts of these two young people had remained pure and chaste, even in the act of sin?”

Antoine thought: That’s curious! By rights all this should get intensely on my nerves. But not a bit of it! There’s something in her that compels respect. More than respect—affection. Her goodness of heart, perhaps… . And of course it’s extremely rare, goodness of heart, the real thing—the kind she has, the natural kind.

“Jenny has every reason to be thankful,” Mme. de Fontanin continued in her strong, musical voice, still plying her needle. “She now has in her heart a precious memory that will ennoble her whole life, a memory of the world well lost, a marvellous moment; one which, moreover—and how rare that is!—has not been followed by any sordid disillusionment.”

Some people, Antoine mused, manage to build up for themselves, once for all, a satisfying theory of the Scheme of Things. After which it’s all plain sailing. Yes, that’s just the metaphor; their lives are like a pleasant cruise in summer weather, with a favouring wind behind them all the way … right up to the last landfall.

“And now she has before her the noblest of tasks: the upbringing of—“

Antoine interrupted her almost brusquely. “I found her much changed, quite a different person, in fact. She has matured. No, that’s not the word. I mean, she’s …”

Mme. de Fontanin had placed her sewing on her knees and taken off her spectacles. Now she bent toward him. “I’m going to let you into a secret, Antoine. It’s this: I believe Jenny’s *happy*. Yes, happy as: she’s never been before. As happy as it’s possible for her to be, for Jenny wasn’t born to happiness. Even as a child, she was always moping, and no one could do anything about it; melancholy was. engrained in her. Worse still, self-hatred; she could never manage to-appreciate herself, to love, in herself, one of God’s creatures. And, alas, she was never religious-minded; her soul has always been an empty temple. And now, see how the Holy Spirit is always working in us and about us! Every sorrow has its recompense; every discord adds to the Universal Harmony. Today grace has come to her. Today I know—my intuition tells me—that the dear child has found, in her present lot of widowhood and motherhood, the utmost she can get of human happiness, the utmost tranquillity and well-being of which her nature is capable… .”

“Aunt!” a voice cried from the garden.

Mme. de Fontanin rose from her chair. “Ah, there’s Nicole back.”

“The Mayor is here, Aunt,” the voice continued. “He wants to talk to you.”

Mme. de Fontanin was already outside the door. Antoine heard her calling cheerfully from the top of the stairs: “Come up to my room, darling, and keep company to … to somebody you know.”

The door opened. Nicole stopped short on the threshold and stood staring at Antoine as if she were not sure of recognizing him.

A sudden discouragement came over him; he said in a low voice: “Yes, I look a dreadful wreck. No wonder you can’t recognize me!”

She blushed, then, mastering her embarrassment, began to laugh. “Of course I recognize you. Only—I never dreamt of meeting you here.”

They had not seen each other yet, as Nicole had not come back to the hostel on the previous evening; preferring not to leave the paratyphoid patient to the night nurse, she had spent the night at his bedside.

Unlike Antoine, Nicole seemed to have taken a new lease of youth. A sleepless night had not impaired the natural freshness of her complexion or dulled the sheen of her grey-blue eyes.

He asked her about her husband, whom he had met twice in the course of the war.

“Just now he’s with his motor-ambulance unit on the Champagne front.” As she spoke she darted this way and that her sparkling gaze, in which schoolgirl innocence and the deliberately sensual appeal of experienced womanhood were indistinguishably mingled. “He’s worked off his feet. But he still finds time to write for the *Medical Review*. He’s sent me an article to type this week. It’s about the technique of applying tourniquets, or something of the sort.”

A sunbeam, skimming the soft curve of a shoulder outlined beneath the close-fitting blouse, flickered along the trailing folds of her nurse’s veil each time she moved, lighting up the golden down of a bare forearm and, when she smiled, flashing white upon her teeth. Antoine suddenly thought: “She must play the devil with the hearts of the young fellows sent here from the front.”

“I was awfully sorry not to be able to get back to the hostel last night,” she said. “What sort of evening did you have? Was Daniel in a good humour? Did you manage to get him out of his shell a bit?”

“Oh, yes… . Why do you ask?”

“He’s so grumpy, such an old grouch nowadays.”

Antoine could not help protesting. “After all, poor fellow, he has good reasons for being like that.”

“But it’s bad for him. Something should be done to shake him out of it, to make him take up his painting again.” Her tone was earnest, as if this were a problem of extreme importance to her and Antoine’s visit were the heavensent opportunity she had been waiting for to solve it. “The life he’s leading here can’t be allowed to go on indefinitely. He’s mouldering away, he’s becoming an utter waster!”

“I see no signs of it,” Antoine said with a smile.

"But it's true. Ask Jenny. He's really quite impossible. Either he goes up to his bedroom the moment we get back—is it ill-humour or just unsociability? I haven't an idea—or else he stays with us, but never opens his mouth. When he comes into a room the temperature seems to go down with a rush! His presence makes us all uncomfortable. I assure you, you'd be doing him a great service if you could make him see it's up to him to start work again, go back to Paris, mix with people, come back to real life."

Antoine merely gave a noncommittal nod and murmured again: "Poor fellow!" An instinctive suspicion kept him on his guard; though he could not account for it, he had an impression that Nicole was actuated 'by some secret motive which she was careful to conceal.

His intuition was not wholly at fault. Since a certain night of the previous winter, she had had her own ideas regarding Daniel. That night, after Jenny and Gise had gone upstairs, Nicole, who had some work she wanted to finish, had stayed on late in the drawing-room, sitting opposite her cousin, in front of the fire. Suddenly he had said: "Stay that way, Nico! Don't move!" and, picking up a sheet of paper which happened to be lying on the floor beside him, had begun to make a pencil sketch of Nicole's face in profile. She had fallen in willingly enough with his whim. But, some moments later, a vague presentiment had caused her to turn and throw a quick glance at

him. Daniel, who had stopped drawing, was devouring her with his eyes, and their expression was revolting: a mingling of sensual desire and baffled rage, of shame and something akin to hatred. At once he had looked down, crumpled up the paper, and tossed it into the fire. Then, without a word, he had left the room. "So that's it," Nicole had murmured in consternation. "He's still in love with me!" For it was still fresh in her memory, that far-off period of her youth when she was living with her aunt in Paris, and Daniel, then hardly more than a boy, had been so desperately infatuated with her, dogging her steps at every turn, following her into every corner of the apartment. She had regarded this frantic, unavailing passion as definitely of the past; but it seemed that their life together at the hostel had stirred to life again the ashes of that bygone ardour. And that night all had become plain to Nicole; Daniel's love for her explained everything: his fits of sulkiness, his taciturnity and fretfulness, his obstinate determination not to leave Maisons and to persist in his present hermitlike existence of idleness and continence—so alien to his temperament and previous mode of life.

"Let me tell you what I think," Nicole continued. She had no idea of the suspicions her insistence roused in Antoine. "Daniel's to be pitied; there I quite agree with you. But it's not his … his infirmity that's at the root of the trouble. Women have intuitions about these things, you know. No; there's something else, something more subtle preying on his mind. Quite likely it's a trouble of a sentimental order, a hopeless passion."

Suddenly she feared she had betrayed her secret, and a faint blush rose to her cheeks. But Antoine was not looking at her. A picture had risen in his mind of Daniel sprawling in his chair under the plane trees, chewing his gum, dull-eyed, his hands folded behind his neck.

"Who can say?" he murmured innocently.

Reassured, she broke into a laugh. "Why, you know as well as I do the life that Daniel used to lead in Paris before the war… ."

She stopped speaking, listened. There was a sound of footsteps on the landing.

Mme. de Fontanin entered, a sheaf of papers in her hand. "I'm afraid I'll have to rush off again at once. So sorry!" She held up the correspondence—letters and long official envelopes—she had brought. "You'd never believe all the daily reports we have to send in to the authorities, in duplicate or triplicate! It's appalling! My afternoon mail alone gives me a couple of hours' work each day."

Antoine rose. "I'll be off now."

"You must come again. Will you be staying long with us?"

"Afraid not. I'm going back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? You can't mean it!" Nicole exclaimed.

"I'm due back at Le Mousquier on Friday."

The three walked down the rickety stairs together.

Mme. de Fontanin glanced at her wristwatch. "Anyhow, I'll come with you as far as the gate."

"And I must leave you," Nicole said. "See you tonight."

When Nicole was out of earshot, Mme. de Fontanin, without stopping, asked in an anxious voice: "Nicole talked to you about Daniel, didn't she? … My poor son! He is never far from my thoughts, and I pray for him without ceasing. It's a heavy cross that has been laid on his young shoulders."

"At least you have the assurance that he will be spared to you. And in times like these that's no small consolation."

Antoine could see that the remark was lost on her; that was not the angle from which she viewed such things. They took a few steps in silence; then she said: "All day alone … alone with his infirmity. Alone with that regret which he will share with no one, not even with me. Poor boy!"

Antoine stopped short in the middle of the drive, and now his look was frankly questioning.

"One can enter so well into his feelings," Mme. de Fontanin went on, in the same level tone of sorrowful composure, "when one considers his temperament—so passionate and so high-minded. Think what it means to him to feel so fit and full of energy and to see his country invaded, in grave peril! And to feel he can no longer do anything to help!"

"Do you really think it's that?" Antoine blurted out. This explanation of Daniel's moodiness was so unexpected that he was unable to conceal his scepticism.

She straightened herself up to her full height; a self-confident smiles with a hint of pride in it, settled on her lips. "There's no mystery about what's wrong with Daniel and, alas, no remedy for it. Daniel's heart-broken at being no longer fit to do his duty." And noticing that Antoine seemed still not quite convinced, she added with a look at once ecstatic and austere: "If you want a proof of what I'm saying, here it is. If Daniel shrinks from coming to the hospital, it's not so much that, as he professes, the walk here tires him. No, it's because he can't bear to mix with these young fellows of his own age who, like him, have been wounded but, unlike him, will very soon be going back to do their duty at the front."

Antoine made no reply. In silence they walked on. A few yards from the entrance-gate Mme. de Fontanin halted. "Only God knows when we shall see each other again." She gazed at Antoine with emotion, and when he held out his hand kept it pressed between her palms for a moment. "May all go well with you, my friend."

# Chapter XI

AS ANTOINE walked across the stretch of open ground in front of the gates,' he pondered on the "enigma" which everyone he had talked to seemed to find in Daniel. Each of those women, he reflected, tried to make me accept her pet solution. And, likely as not, there isn't any enigma at all!

Somewhat tired, but surprised and pleased to find he was not more so, he made his way slowly toward the Fontanins' house. It was a relief to be alone. The spacious avenue, flanked by lime trees, stretched before him up to the outskirts of the forest. It was four o'clock, and already the declining sun was tangled in the tree-trunks, marking the grass with level shafts of light. Now and again, remembering the dusty roads of the Riviera, he sniffed luxuriously the keen and sparkling air, rife with the vernal fragrance of the green, unspoilt countryside encircling Paris.

But there was a melancholy undertone to his content; his visit to Maisons had evoked too many memories of the past. And this glimpse of his old country home had conjured up a host of phantoms that dogged his loitering steps: his youth, his robust health of earlier years, his father, Jacques. During the last twenty-four hours Jacques's presence had been constantly beside him. Never before had he felt so poignantly that Jacques's death had robbed him of one who could never be replaced: an only *brother*. For the first time he was fully aware of the irretrievability of his loss. He went so far as to reproach himself for the belatedness of his mood, this tardy access of genuine despair. What had prevented him from feeling thus before? The pressure of circumstances, perhaps; the war… .

He clearly recalled the moment when a letter had come to him from Rumelles, a letter that clinched the matter, extinguished the last spark of hope. It had been handed to him in the ambulance parking-lot at Verdun, only a few hours before his division moved on to the Eparges sector. He had been busy preparing for the move, and later on, in the confusion of settling in, had not had time to give way to emotion. Nor indeed, in the following fortnight; hurrying from one point to another through mud and deluges of rain, struggling to carry on as best he could in the ruined villages of the Woëvre district, worked off his feet, he had had no time to spare for personal afflictions. Subsequently, during a quiet spell, he had read the letter again, answered Rumelles, and gradually become inured to his bereavement, without having ever given it much thought.

Today, however, with everything around him bringing back his home life of the pre-war years, at last regret took concrete form, the sense of loss struck home with an intensity he had not known before. Even here, in the road leading to the forest, every detail of the landscape was charged with memories of Jacques. Those white hurdles, for instance—despite their difference in age, he and Jacques had often vaulted them together, in friendly contest; side by side they had sprawled in that green meadow, just before haymaking time; one day they had amused themselves dislodging with a pointed stick the nests of those flat-backed insects which still swarmed on the mossy roots of the limes and which they had named "soldiers" because of their scarlet shells quaintly patterned with black chevrons. Together, on afternoons like this, they had roamed beside those hedges and palings, plucking as they passed sprigs of early lilac or laburnum; often and often they had cycled along this very road with a bathing-suit or racket strapped to the handle-bars. And, yonder, a gateway shadowed by acacias brought back to him that year when, still a schoolboy, he had gone for private lessons during the vacation to an old pedagogue who was spending the summer at Maisons. Often at nightfall Mademoiselle and Jacques had come to meet him there, so that he should not have to come home by himself across the park. And he seemed to see his brother, then a three-year-old child, freeing his hand from Mademoiselle's, running to meet him, clinging to his arm and prattling away about the small adventures of his afternoon.

He was still following the same train of thought when he reached the hostel. And when, as he pushed open the little gate leading into the garden, he saw Paul let go of Uncle Dan's hand and rush up to him, he seemed to see Jacques running toward him—the same shock of reddish-brown hair, the same bold, decided movements. More deeply stirred than he cared to show, he caught up the child in his arms, as he used to do with his brother, and was about to give him a kiss. But Paul, who could not bear any sort of restraint, even by way of an embrace, struggled and kicked so violently that Antoine, laughing and breathless, had to put him down again.

Daniel had watched the little scene, his hands in his pockets.

"What strength the young ruffian has!" Antoine exclaimed with almost fatherly pride. "The way he wriggles! It's like trying to hold an eel you've just pulled out of the water."

Daniel smiled, and his smile betrayed a pride exactly similar to Antoine's. Then he pointed skyward. "Gorgeous day, isn't it? … Another summer beginning."

Slightly exhausted by his tussle with Paul, Antoine had seated himself on the border of the path.

"Going to stay here for a bit?" Daniel inquired. "I've been on my feet for quite a while, and my apology for a leg needs a rest. Do you mind looking after the kid?"

"Not a bit."

Daniel turned to the child. "You'll come in presently with Uncle Antoine. Are you going to be good?"

Paul looked down without replying. He shot Antoine a quick sidelong glance, then followed Daniel's retreating form with his eyes, evidently in half a mind to follow him. But just then a cockchafer came blundering by and crashed upon its back. Forgetting all about Uncle Dan, Paul squatted on the ground and fell to watching the insect's vain struggles to right itself.

Antoine decided that the best method of making the child get used to him would be to seem to take no notice. He remembered a way he used to have of amusing Jacques, when he was of Paul's age. Picking up a thick piece of pine-bark from the ground beside him, he began to whittle it into the shape of a boat.

Paul, who had been secretly observing him, very soon came up. "Oo's knife?" he asked.

"Mine. Uncle Antoine's a soldier, so he has to have a knife to cut his bread and meat."

The explanation was obviously of no interest to Paul. "What's you doing?"

"Can't you see? I'm making a little boat—a little boat for you. When your mummy bathes you, you can put the boat into the bath and, you'll see, it'll float on the water like a real ship."

The child listened, his brows wrinkled with the strain of mental concentration. In the frown there was a certain discomposure too; his uncle's weak, hoarse voice affected him unpleasantly.

And, strangely enough, he appeared to have understood nothing of what Antoine had said. Could it be that he had never seen a boat? … He gave a sigh, then seizing upon the one point which had struck him by its glaring inaccuracy, hastened to set it right. "Mummy don't bathe me. Uncle Dan bathes me." Then he returned to his cockchafer, completely indifferent to Antoine's work of art.

Antoine accepted the rebuff, and, throwing away the boat, put the knife down beside him.

After a moment Paul came back. Antoine made another effort to catch his interest. "Have you done anything nice today? Have you been for a walk in the garden with Uncle Dan?"

The child, after groping, it seemed, in the depths of his memory, nodded.

"Have you been good?"

He nodded again, but almost immediately ran up to Antoine and after a brief hesitation confided gravely: "Me not quite sure."

Antoine could not help smiling. "What? You're not sure whether you've been good or not?"

"Yes! Me been good!" Paul cried indignantly. Then the same odd doubt came over him again. He wrinkled up his nose comically and, lingering on each word, repeated: "But me not quite sure."

He made as if to go away, but, as he was passing behind Antoine, made a sudden grab at the knife, which was lying on the ground. "No!" Antoine remonstrated, covering the knife with his hand. "Leave it alone!"

The child stood his ground, looking daggers at him.

"Mustn't play with that," Antoine said. "You'll cut yourself." He shut the knife and put it in his pocket. Paul glared at him in high dudgeon. Antoine tried to make peace, and smilingly held out his hand. The blue eyes flashed; then lifting the outstretched hand toward his lips as if to kiss it, the child dug his small sharp teeth into the little finger.

"Ow!" Antoine gasped, so staggered by the outrage that it did not even occur to him to be angry. "Paul is very naughty," he said, rubbing his finger where the small teeth had nipped it. "Paul has hurt poor Uncle Antoine."

The boy looked at him inquiringly. "Very much hurt?" he asked.

"Very much."

"Very much hurt," Paul repeated with obvious satisfaction. Then, turning on his heel, he scampered off across the terrace.

The child's conduct puzzled Antoine. Was it simply a desire for revenge? he wondered. Hardly that. What then? An action like that may mean all sorts of things. It's quite possible that, when he found he couldn't disobey my orders not to touch the knife, the realization of his own helplessness came over him with a rush and carried him away. Perhaps when he bit my finger like that it wasn't so much to hurt or punish me. His nerves may have been so strung up that he was bound to find some relief for them—it was an irresistible physical impulse, in fact. In any case, if we're to judge a reaction of that sort, we need first to be able to estimate exactly the forces actuating it. The impulse to grab that knife may have been more imperative than an adult could possibly suspect.

Remembering his duty to keep an eye on Paul, he glanced toward the terrace. Oblivious of the world, the little fellow was trying to clamber up a mound of earth some ten yards away.

Jacques, Antoine told himself, would certainly have been quite capable of an equally vindictive reaction. But would he have gone so far as actually to bite me?

He appealed to his memories for better understanding. He could not resist the temptation of identifying past and present, father and son. The glance Paul had flung at him had revealed the first stage of tendencies he knew only too well: spite, defiance, a thirst for revolt, and pride—aloof, ungovernable pride; he had seen them all before, many a time, in his brother's eyes. It seemed so striking an analogy that he was impelled to carry it still further, so far as to persuade himself that behind this child's rebellious attitude lay hidden the same high qualities as had been always latent beneath Jacques's outbursts of revolt: a rare integrity of purpose, extreme sensitiveness, and a wealth of affection always misunderstood.

Fearing to catch cold, he was about to rise when his attention was caught by the extraordinary gymnastic feats in which the little fellow was indulging. The mound he was trying to storm was something like six feet high; the right and left sides rising gently from the level were easy of ascent, but in the middle the gradient was stiff—and it was precisely this face that the child was set on scaling. Several times in succession Antoine saw him take a run, scramble half-way up the slope, lose footing, and roll back to the ground. He could not hurt himself very much, as the fall was broken by a carpet of pine-needles. He appeared completely absorbed in the feat he had set himself; apart from it the world did not exist for him. With every attempt he came nearer the summit; the height from which he tumbled was greater each time. After each fall he rubbed his knees and began again.

That's the true Thibault spirit coming out, Antoine thought, not without satisfaction. The spirit that made Father so tyrannical and domineering, Jacques so headstrong and rebellious, and in my case took the form of dogged perseverance. This little fellow has obviously the same driving force within him. What form, I wonder, will it take later on?

Once more the little boy charged up the mound and this time so fiercely, so recklessly, that he all but reached his goal. But then he lost foothold in the crumbling soil; he was on the point of toppling over once again when he grasped a tuft of grass, managed to keep his balance, and with a final effort hoisted himself to the summit.

Antoine thought: I bet he'll look round now to see if I've been watching!

He was wrong. The boy kept his back turned and took no notice of his uncle. He stood for a moment, his small feet squarely planted in the turf. Then, satisfied no doubt, he walked composedly down one of the more gradual inclines, without even casting a backward glance at the scene of his triumph. Leaning against a tree, he took off one of his sandals, shook out the pebbles, and painstakingly put it on again. Then, knowing he could not button the strap himself, he went up to Antoine and held out his foot without a word. Antoine smiled and did the necessary, without comment. Then he said: "Now let's go indoors, Paul."

"No."

Antoine thought: He has a way that's all his own of saying No. Jenny's right; it isn't so much that he wants to get out of doing the particular thing one asks of him, but he's determined to say No to everybody; he won't give up an atom of his independence for any reason whatsoever.

"Now, then, Paul," he said, rising to his feet, "be a good boy. Uncle Dan's waiting for us. Come along!"

"No."

Conscious that the management of unruly children was not his forte, Antoine endeavoured to turn the difficulty. “You show me the way. Which path do we go along? This one or that one?” He tried to take the child’s hand. But Paul put his hands resolutely behind his back.

“Me say No!”

“All right,” Antoine replied. “So you want to stay there all by yourself? Well, stay, then.” And with deliberate steps he walked off toward the house, whose pink walls glowed across the trees, lit up by the setting sun.

Before he had gone very far he heard Paul running up, full tilt, behind him. He decided to say some friendly word when the child caught up with him, as if nothing had happened. But Paul ran by him without stopping and, as he passed, flung out insolently: “Me going in—’cause me wants to!”

# Chapter XII

DINNER at the hostel was as a rule a fairly cheerful function, thanks to the flow of small talk kept up by Gise and Nicole. Glad to be through with their day's work—and perhaps, too, at feeling free from the control of Mme. de Fontanin, who with all her motherliness was something of a martinet—they discussed in the frankest terms the happenings of the day, compared notes regarding newcomers to the hospital, and with schoolgirl zest exclaimed upon the trivial incidents of their respective daily rounds.

Though feeling rather limp, Antoine was tickled by the assurance with which, in studiously technical terms, they discussed certain treatments and passed judgment on the competence of the various doctors. On several occasions they appealed to him for an expert opinion, which he furnished smilingly.

Busy looking after her son, who was having his dinner with the grownups, Jenny paid little heed to what was said. Daniel, though taciturn as usual vis-a-vis Nicole and his sister, now and then addressed a remark to Antoine.

Nicole had brought an evening paper, in which there was mention of the long-range bombardments of Paris. Several buildings in the central districts had recently been hit; five persons, including three women and a small baby, had been killed. The baby's death had provoked a unanimous denunciation of German barbarity in the Allied press.

The fact that such atrocities were possible in modern times revolted Nicole. "Those Huns!" she cried "They're absolute brutes! Their poison gas and flame-throwers were bad enough. But this slaughtering of mere civilians, innocent children, it's simply monstrous, it's inconceivable! They must have lost every spark of decency, every human feeling, to behave like that!"

"Does the slaughter of innocent civilians," Antoine suggested, "really strike you as much more inhuman, more immoral, more monstrous, than the butchery of young soldiers at the front?"

Nicole and Gise stared at him, open-mouthed.

Daniel had laid down his fork and was looking down in silence at his plate.

"Don't forget this," Antoine continued. "Any attempt to impose rules on war, to restrict it, organize it—'humanize' it, as they say—to declare that this or that is 'barbarous' or 'immoral,' implies that there's another way of making war, a gentlemanly way, a way that's perfectly humane and moral." He paused and tried to catch Jenny's eye. But she was holding a mug to her son's lips and seemed intent on her maternal task.

"What is it that's so monstrous?" he went on. "Is it really that it's more cruel to kill men in one way rather than another? Or that certain people are the victims rather than others?"

Jenny stopped feeding the child and set down the mug so violently that the milk splashed on the tablecloth. "What is monstrous," she said through her clenched teeth, "is the apathy of the masses. They have the numbers, they have the last word. No war can be carried on against their will. Why don't they do something? They have only to say No, and the peace which they're all eager for will follow instantly."

Daniel's eyebrows lifted and he shot a quick, enigmatic glance at her.

There was a short silence. Then Antoine summed up in a calm, confident tone. "What's monstrous isn't any particular form of war. The monstrous thing is *war itself*."

Some minutes passed before anyone dared to resume the conversation.

Antoine was pondering on Jenny's last remark. Was it true that the masses set such store by peace? Doubtless, he told himself, they clamour for it, once a war is on. But no sooner do they get it than their mutual intolerance and fighting instincts come into play again, and peace is once more imperilled. It's true enough that the various governments and their international policies are responsible for wars. But we must not forget that human nature has a large share in that responsibility. … In fact, at the base of every form of pacifism lies a belief in the ethical progress of mankind. I have that belief or, rather, I've an emotional need to feel it; I can't bring myself to admit that human nature isn't perfectible *ad infinitum*. I *need* to believe that one day man will contrive to bring order out of chaos and institute upon this planet a reign of universal brotherhood. But, to bring this about, it's not enough that an enlightened few should consecrate their efforts and their lives to this ideal. No, centuries of evolution are needed; thousands of years, perhaps. What hope is there of anything really fine emerging from twentieth-century man? And the trouble is that, try as I may, I can't discover in so remote a prospect anything to console me for being obliged to live among the ravening beasts that are the human race today… .

He noticed that the others were still silent. The atmosphere at the dinner-table was still tense, charged with hostile currents. Conscious of his responsibility for this state of things and regretting it, he tried to give the conversation a new direction, and turned to Daniel. "By the way, have you heard anything of that eccentric friend of yours, the pastor? What's he up to, these days?"

"Pastor Gregory, you mean?"

The name was enough to bring a twinkle of amusement to the eyes of all the young people at table.

In a mournful tone, contrasting quaintly with the smile that hovered on her lips, Nicole said: "Aunt Thérèse is dreadfully worried about him. He's been in a sanatorium at Arcachon since last Easter."

"The last news we had," Daniel added, "was that he was confined to his bed."

Jenny put in a word, mentioning that the pastor had been at the front since the beginning of the war. Then the conversation flagged again. … To keep it up, Antoine inquired: "Did he join up?"

"Well," Daniel said, "he tried his best to go on active service, but his age and health made it impossible. So he joined an American ambulance section. He spent the whole of that terrible winter of 1917 on the British front. He had attack after attack of bronchitis. Then he started spitting blood. But he wouldn't quit until they forced him to. Only—then it was too late."

"The last time we saw him was in 1916," Jenny said. "He was on leave and came to visit us here."

"He looked quite changed already," Nicole added. "An absolute ghost. With a big Tolstoyan beard. Like an old magician in a fairytale. "

"Did he still refuse to employ medicines?" Antoine asked. "And insist on treating diseases with his mumbo-jumbo?"

Nicole burst out laughing. “He was crazier than ever! You should have heard the things he said to us when he was here. For two years he’d been conveying dying men in his ambulance, and he kept on calmly telling us: ‘There is no death!’ ”

“Nicole!” Gise exclaimed. It distressed her that the pastor should be held up to ridicule, especially before Antoine.

“Of course,” Nicole explained, “the word ‘death’ rarely crosses his lips. He calls it ‘the mortal illusion,’ whatever that may signify.”

“And in his last letter to Mamma,” Daniel said with a smile, “there was a real gem. This is about what he wrote: ‘My life will soon depart onto the plane of the invisible.’ ”

Gise cast a reproachful look at Antoine. “Don’t laugh, Antoine. I know he seems absurd, but he’s a really saintly man.”

“I dare say you’re right, Gise,” Antoine admitted. “He may be a saint. But I can’t help thinking of all the poor wounded Tommies who were unlucky enough to fall into his saintly clutches. And nothing will convince me that as an ambulance-man he wasn’t a public danger.”

They had finished dessert. Jenny helped Paul down from his chair and rose. The others followed her example and walked after her into the drawing-room. She did not stay, however, but went upstairs at once to put the child to bed; they had sat at table longer than usual that evening.

While Gise, in a low chair some distance from the light, settled down to knitting (she always presented her soldier-patients with a pair of socks knitted by herself when, on recovery, they left the hospital to rejoin their regiments), Daniel took a volume of *Round the World* from the piano on which it was lying and went over to the sofa behind the big circular table on which was placed the only light in the room, an oil-lamp.

Watching the young man poring over his book with the application of an industrious schoolboy, Antoine wondered if he were really interested in its old-fashioned illustrations or whether this were not a habit Daniel had developed to keep himself in countenance.

He went up to the fire place, where Nicole, kneeling on the hearthrug, was kindling a fire.

“It’s ages since I last saw a log-fire,” he remarked.

“The nights are still a bit chilly. And, anyhow, it makes the room more cheerful.” She straightened up and turned to him. “Do you know, it was here, at Maisons, we met for the first time? I can remember it ever so well. How about you?”

“Yes, I remember it too.”

That far-off summer evening, how clearly it came back to him, when, yielding to Jacques’s insistence, he had accompanied him to the “Huguenots’ ” house, despite their father’s veto! He recalled his surprise at meeting there his friend Felix Héquet, a young surgeon some years his senior. Pictures formed before his eyes of Jenny and Nicole walking side by side in the rose-alley; of Jacques, then a student, fresh from his success in the Ecole Normale examination; and himself, a budding medical practitioner whom Mme. de Fontanin was alone in addressing punctiliously as “Doctor.” Days remote, indeed! Then all of them were young, rejoicing in their youth and prospects of the future, without an inkling of what lay ahead—the cataclysm the statesmen of Europe were preparing for them behind the scenes, which was ruthlessly to sweep away all their petty personal ambitions, to cut short the careers of some and change completely those of others, to pile ruin on ruin, bereavement on bereavement, throwing the whole world into chaos—for how many years yet?

“I’d just got engaged,” she went on in a pensive voice, in which there was an undertone of melancholy. “Felix had brought me here in his car. We had a breakdown on the way back, I remember, in the Sartrouville woods, and it was past midnight when we got back to Paris.”

Daniel’s eyelids lifted and he shot a rapid glance in their direction which Antoine intercepted. Was he listening? Did this recall of happier days stir him with faint longings, with regrets? Or was it merely, Antoine wondered, that their foolish chatter got on his nerves? Daniel fell to perusing his magazine again. But, a few minutes later, stifling a yawn, he rose, closed the volume, walked stiffly up to them, and said good night.

Gise put down her knitting. “Going upstairs, Daniel?”

In the dim light her hair seemed woollier, her complexion darker than ever, the whites of her eyes still more lustrous. The glow from the burning logs made the bent form on the low chair seem like an evocation of the African wild—a native woman squatting beside her jungle campfire.

She rose. “I think your lamp has been left in the kitchen. Come along, I’ll light it for you.”

They went out of the room together. Antoine followed them with his eyes, then, turning back to Nicole, noticed her gaze intent on him. An odd little smile formed on her lips. “Daniel ought to marry her,” she murmured.

“What?”

“I mean it. Don’t you think it would be a perfect match?”

Antoine was so taken aback that he halted where he stood, staring at her, his eyebrows lifted. Tossing her head back, she burst into a peal of deep, full-throated laughter. “Sorry! I’d no idea I was saying anything so outrageous!”

She drew a chair up to the fire and sank into it, crossing one leg over the other. There was something deliberately alluring in her languorous grace as she looked him over in silence. He sat down beside her.

“Do you really think there’s anything between them?”

“I didn’t say that,” she hastened to reply. “I’m pretty sure that Daniel, at any rate, hasn’t dreamt of such a thing.”

“Neither has Gise!” he exclaimed impulsively.

“No, probably Gise hasn’t either. But you can see she’s interested in him. She’s always the one who runs his errands, and gets him his papers and chewing-gum. And, what’s more, it’s pretty plain that he likes it. I suppose you’ve noticed that she’s the only one of us who doesn’t have to bear the brunt of his fits of bad temper.”

Antoine made no reply. His first reaction had been one of repugnance for the suggestion that Gise might marry; he could not wholly forget the past or the part that Gise had played in his life for a little while. On second thought, however, he could not see any objection that would hold water.

The corners of Nicole’s mouth were still dimpling with silent laughter. But her gaiety seemed forced and overdone, somehow; so much so that Antoine wondered if by any chance she were in love with her cousin.

"Now really, doctor, you must admit it isn't such a wild notion as all that," she persisted. "Gise could devote the rest of her existence to him, and I can't think of any way in which a girl of her type has a better chance of making something of her life. And as for Daniel …" Slowly she let her head sink back till the coils of fair hair were pillowed on the cushions. Between the moist, parted lips Antoine caught for a moment the white gleam of her teeth. Then, lowering her eyelids, she shot a quick, deliberately meaningful glance at him. "You know, Daniel's the kind of man who likes being doted on."

On the other side of the wall the old oak staircase creaked; she started, made a slight, almost imperceptible grimace, then, with a deftness in deception that Antoine found almost perturbing, changed the subject. "That reminds me of the paratyphoid case I was sitting up with last night. He was an oldish man, in the forties; a Savoyard, I imagine." At this point Jenny came in, followed by Gise, and Nicole immediately speeded up her flow of conversation. "Anyhow, he raved all night in some queer dialect—I couldn't understand any of it, except one word. Now and again he'd cry out 'Mummy!' in a voice like a baby's. It was absolutely heart-rending."

Antoine took up his cue with a promptness that gave him an absurd feeling of pride. "Oh, yes, I've heard that often enough myself. But actually it's not quite what it seems. I'm glad to say it's no more than a meaningless cry, a return of the subconscious mind to a childhood habit. I've heard a lot of dying men cry out 'Mother!' but I don't believe many of them were really thinking of their mothers."

Jenny, who had brought in a bundle of brown wool to be wound into balls, asked: "Who's going to help me tonight?"

"I'm dreadfully sleepy, I confess," Nicole said, smiling lazily, with a glance at the clock. "Why, it's twenty to ten!"

Gise said: "I will."

Jenny shook her head. "No, darling; you're fagged out too. Go and have a good sleep."

Nicole kissed Jenny, then turned to Antoine. "I hope you'll excuse me. We have to be up and about at seven in the morning, and I didn't sleep a wink last night."

Gise came up next. Her heart was aching with the thought that Antoine was leaving the next day, that his visit was to end without their having been together again; she yearned to recapture the delightful intimacy of their talk in Paris. But she dared not voice her regrets for fear of bursting into tears; without speaking, she offered her cheek for a kiss.

"Good-bye, dear little Blackie." There was a deep tenderness in his voice.

Promptly she was convinced that he had guessed her thoughts and that he too felt the pang of parting; and, now that she was sure of his sympathy, the parting suddenly became more bearable.

Avoiding his eyes, she followed Nicole out of the room. It struck Antoine that she had not said good night to Jenny, but, before he had time to wonder whether any misunderstanding had arisen between them, Jenny hurried across the room and laid a detaining hand on Gise's shoulder just as she was going out.

"I'm not sure that Paul has enough bedclothes on him. Would you mind putting something over his feet?"

"The pink blanket?"

"The white one's warmer."

Again, Antoine noted, Gise had omitted to say good night to Jenny on leaving her.

He had remained standing. "What about you, Jenny?" he asked. "Aren't you going to bed? You mustn't stay up for me, you know."

"I'm not a bit sleepy," she assured him, settling herself in the chair Nicole had just left.

"Well, then, to work! Hand me over one of those hanks of wool—I'm going to take Gise's place."

He helped himself to a skein and squatted in the low chair. Jenny smiled and gave in.

"There you are!" he laughed, after several false starts. "It's running like clockword now."

His unaffected friendliness filled her with surprise and delight. She was ashamed of having so long misunderstood him, and she saw him now as a tower of strength, dependable and valiant. When a fit of coughing compelled Antoine to stop helping her, she thought: If only he could get well again, if only he could be once more the man he used to be! For her son's sake it was important that Antoine should regain his health.

When the cough had abated, he set to work again and, coming straight to the point, said: "You know, Jenny, I'm very relieved to see you like this-—I mean, so … so settled, so calm."

Jenny looked down at the ball she was winding, and repeated meditatively: "Calm… ."

Yes, in spite of everything, it was true. She was sometimes astonished herself at this peace which had come to her, deadening her grief. As she pondered over Antoine's remark, she compared her present state of mind with the inner turmoil, the agonizing feeling of emptiness, that had been hers three and a half years ago. She saw herself as she was in the early months of the war, without news of Jacques and fearing the worst; now up in arms against the world, now prostrated by her sense of loneliness and yet unable to hear the company of others, shunning both her mother and her home. It was as if she were clutching at something she could not do without, and which ever slipped through her fingers. She remembered how she used to wander for whole afternoons in that unfamiliar wartime Paris, making indefatigable pilgrimages to the places she had visited with Jacques: the Gare de l'Est, St. Vincent de Paul's close, the Rue du Croissant, the café around the Bourse where she had so often waited for him, the side-streets of Montrouge and that meeting-hall where, one memorable night, Jacques had roused an audience to a wild demonstration against the war. Then, when nightfall and her exhaustion forced her to return home, desperately she would fling herself, sobbing her heart out, onto the bed where she had once lain in Jacques's arms and fall into a fitful sleep, only to awaken once more in the grey, hopeless dawn to the prospect of another desolate day. Yes, indeed, in comparison with that early phase her present life was wonderfully calm. In the past three years everything had changed around and within her—even her memories of Jacques. How strange, she mused, that even the most heart-felt love cannot escape the ravages of time! When she thought of Jacques nowadays she never visualized him as he would be today, or even as he was in July 1914. No, the Jacques she saw with her mind's eye was not the changeable, nerve-ridden being she had known; she saw a seated figure, statue-still, one hand resting on his thigh, the light from a high studio window falling on his forehead, the Jacques, in fact, of the portrait which was before her eyes night and day.

Suddenly a new thought waylaid her, an appalling realization. She had just pictured what would happen were Jacques unexpectedly to return, and her reaction was one of embarrassment quite as much as of joy. Yes, the truth had to be faced: if the Jacques of 1914

were to come back, if by some miracle he were to appear in flesh and blood before the Jenny of today, well, she could not possibly restore to him the place in her heart which until now, as she believed, her faithful devotion had kept intact, inviolate for ever.

She gazed earnestly at Antoine, her eyes dark with distress. But he noticed nothing; his attention was all on keeping the skein taut between his outstretched fingers and guiding the movement of the thread by leaning alternately right and left. He dared not take his eyes off the wool slipping as if by magic from his fingers. He felt rather foolish. His shoulders were cramped and aching, and he cursed himself for his silliness in offering to help. The continual raising of his arms was making his breathing more difficult every moment and he foresaw that, after having stayed so close to the fire on the low chair, he would probably catch cold undressing.

She would have liked to talk to him about herself, about Jacques and the child, as she had done that morning in her bedroom. That unwonted burst of expansiveness had given her a sense of well-being which had lasted on throughout the day. But tonight the "pent-up" feeling had come back, the words would not rise to her lips. There lay the tragedy of her inner life: she was incapable of pouring out her heart to others, doomed to inarticulateness. Even with Jacques she had never been able to "let herself go" wholeheartedly. How often had he accused her of being "enigmatic"! The memory of it rankled still, and cruelly as ever. How would things be, she wondered, in years to come, between her and her son? Was it not all too likely that, try as she might, her seeming aloofness and reserve would raise a barrier between them?

Both looked up simultaneously as the clock struck, and only then did they become aware of how long they had been silent.

"Pity we can't manage all the wool." Jenny smiled. "Let's finish off this skein, anyhow. … I really must be going up." She began to wind the ball more quickly. "Otherwise I may find Gise asleep and it would be a shame to wake her when she's just dropped off. She really does need a rest."

He remembered, then, the twin beds he had seen and knew why Gise had not said good night to Jenny. They shared that room, they slept there together beneath Jacques's portrait, one on each side of Paul's cot. As he thought of Gise's childhood in M. Thibault's apartment, a rush of joy came over him. The poor child has found a real home at last, he thought. Nicole Héquet's remark that Gise should marry Daniel came back to his mind. Though he could not have said why, he did not think that likely. And, anyhow, why need she marry? She could achieve happiness and make the utmost of her life by casting in her lot with Jenny and little Paul. In these two, Jacques lived for her again and on them she could lavish all the boundless affection and doglike fidelity that had lacked an outlet hitherto. And she would settle down into a dear, dusky, grey-haired old creature, Paul's "nice old Auntie Gi."

The last thread slipped from Antoine's fingers. Jenny got up, put away the remaining skeins, and, after banking with ashes the logs in the hearth, took up the big lamp from the table.

"Let me carry it," Antoine suggested rather half-heartedly. But his breathing was so laboured that Jenny preferred to spare him all exertion. "Don't bother, thanks; I'm used to it. I'm always the last to go to bed."

In the doorway she looked back to make sure everything was in order. Her gaze wandered round the old family living-room, then settled on Antoine. "I'm going to bring up my child," she said determinedly, "far away from all this. Once the war's ended, I shall make a complete change in my life and settle down somewhere else."

"What do you mean, somewhere else?"

"I intend to say good-bye to all this," she went on in the same firm, decided tone. "I want to get away."

"Where will you go?" Something prompted him to add: "To Switzerland, I suppose."

She gazed at him in silence for some moments. Then, "No," she said. "I thought of it of course. But since the revolution last October, all Jacques's friends—the sincere ones, anyhow—have moved to Russia. I, too, thought of Russia at one time. But I believe it would be better for Paul to be brought up as a Frenchman. So I shall stay in France. But I must get away from Mother and Daniel, and live my own life. Perhaps I'll settle down somewhere in the country, with Gise. We'll work hard, and try to bring up Paul as he ought to be brought up—as Jacques would have wished him to be."

"Listen, Jenny!" Antoine exclaimed impulsively. "I've every reason to expect that by then I shall have taken up my practice again and, in that case, you must let me bear the expenses… ."

"No, thank you, Antoine," she cut in, with a shake of her head. "I wouldn't hesitate to accept your help if it were really necessary. But I'm quite determined to earn my own living. I want Paul to have an independent woman for his mother, a woman who has won by hard work the right to have her own opinions and to act as she thinks best. Don't you approve?"

"Of course!"

She smiled her gratitude. It seemed that she had said all she wanted him to know, for she opened the door at once and began walking up the stairs. She led the way to his room, put down the lamp, and made sure he had all he needed. Then, as she held out her hand, she said: "I've a confession to make to you, Antoine."

"Yes?" he said encouragingly.

"Well … I haven't always … felt toward you … as I do now."

"Same here." He smiled.

Seeing his smile, she hesitated. Her hand still lay in Antoine's, and she gazed at him with earnest eyes. At last she spoke. "But now, when I think of my child's future, I … You understand, don't you? I feel so much braver when I think you'll always be there, and that Jacques's son won't be a stranger to you. I'll need your advice, Antoine. I want Paul to have all his father's good qualities without …" She could not bring herself to complete the sentence. But immediately she braced herself up—he could feel the small hand quivering between his fingers—and, like a rider putting a stubborn horse over a high fence, went resolutely on. "I wasn't blind to Jacques's faults, you know." She swallowed hard and fell silent again. After a while she added, gazing into space, and the words seemed to escape her, despite herself: "Only, the moment I was with him, I forgot them."

Her eyelids quivered. She was vainly trying to collect her thoughts. Then she asked: "You're not going until after lunch, are you? In that case …" She tried to force a smile to her lips. "In that case we'll see a bit of each other in the morning, won't we?" Then she withdrew her hand, saying in a low voice: "Now, try to get a good night's rest," and moved away toward her room.

# Chapter XIII

DR. THIBAULT, sir." There was a joyous ring in the old butler's voice.

Philip, who had been seated at his desk, writing letters, scrambled hurriedly to his feet; then, with the ungainly, shambling stride so characteristic of him, walked up to Antoine, who had halted on the threshold. Before gripping his hands, he gave him one of those keen glances of his that seemed to strike blue fire between the fluttering eyelids. Slowly wagging his head, and with the bantering smile he used for hiding his feelings when deeply moved, he said: "Congratulations, my dear fellow. You look stunning in your field uniform! … And how are you?"

Antoine thought: How he has aged! The old professor's stoop was more pronounced than ever, the lanky body still more unsteady on the spindle legs. The shaggy eyebrows and goatee had gone snow-white, and yet the eyes and smile had a youthful vivacity, a mischievous elation, which in the worn old face struck an incongruous, almost a jarring, note.

He was wearing red army trousers of an antiquated pattern with black stripes up the side and a morning coat with sagging tails, and this hybrid attire might have been devised to typify his twofold functions, half military, half civilian. Toward the close of 1914 he had been appointed chairman of a committee for the reorganization of the army medical service. From that time on, he had devoted all his energies to combating the inherent vices of a system which, from the outset, had seemed to him disgracefully inadequate. His eminence in the medical world gave him an exceptional freedom of action. He had slashed through red tape, exposed abuses, and moved the powers that be to action. The salutary, if belated, reforms introduced during the past three years were largely due to his courage and pertinacity.

Philip was still holding Antoine's hands, pumping them up and down and making little hissing noises with his lips. "Well, well! It's good to see you again. Tell me, how are you?" He shepherded Antoine toward his desk. "We've so many things to say to each other, one hardly knows where to begin." He had ensconced Antoine in the big armchair in which his patients sat. But, instead of taking his usual place behind his desk, he made a long arm, drew Up a light chair, seated himself astride it, close to Antoine, and gazed at him earnestly.

"Now, my dear fellow, let's have a talk about yourself, this mustard-gas complication. How exactly do things stand?"

Antoine felt suddenly ill at ease. That expression of attentive gravity on Philip's face, his professional look, he had seen it a hundred times before, but this was the first time its focus was—himself!

"I'm looking a bit of a wreck, Chief, isn't that so?"

"A trifle thinner. But that was only to be expected."

Philip took off his glasses, wiped them, replaced them carefully, then bent forward, and, smiling said: "Now, then, out with it!"

"Well, Chief, I've been what they call, with bated breath, 'severely gassed.' And it's no joke, I assure you."

Philip made a slight gesture of impatience. "Quite so! Quite so! Now let's begin at the beginning. Your first wound—has it healed all right?"

"It would have practically disappeared, if the war had ended for me last summer, before my brush with mustard gas. Still, I inhaled very little of it, and I shouldn't be in the state that I'm in now. But it's obvious that the lesions caused by the gas in the right lung have been aggravated by the fact that it had not expanded fully after that first wound."

Philip made a wry face.

"Yes," Antoine continued in a thoughtful tone, "there's no getting away from it, the lung is seriously affected. Of course I'll pull through, but it'll be a long business. And"—a fit of coughing silenced him for some moments—"and I'll be a bit of an invalid, most likely, for the rest of my days."

Philip cut in abruptly: "You're staying to dinner, I hope?"

"With pleasure, Chief. Only, as I told you in my letter, I'm on a diet."

"Denis has been told, and he's laid in a supply of milk… . Now, then! As you're dining here, we've lots of time before us. Let's begin at the beginning. How exactly did it happen? I thought your job kept you in the back areas."

Antoine made a fretful gesture. "It was my own damned folly! At the end of last October I was having an easy time of it at Epernay, where I'd been assigned to organize, as the irony of fate would have it, a gas casualty clearing station. We'd just taken La Malmaison and I was struck by something I'd observed about the gas cases sent to me after the fighting in the Chemin-des-Dames sector: that among them were a large number of Red Cross men and stretcher-bearers. The proportion was unduly high, and I suspected that the protection against gas in the dressing-stations was insufficient, or the men were getting careless. I happened to know slightly the medical officer in charge of the sector and, bursting with misguided zeal, I rushed off to him and got a permit to make an inspection on the spot. It was coming back from that jaunt that I let myself get nabbed, like a damned fool. Just as I was turning my back on the front line, the Boches launched a gas attack; that was my first piece of bad luck. My second was the weather: the air was warm and muggy, unseasonably so. You know, of course, that moisture in the air develops the lethal properties of mustard gas owing to the increased ionization."

"Go on," Philip said. He was resting his elbows on his knees, his chin between his hands, and gazing intently at Antoine.

"I was hurrying as much as I could to get back to the car I'd left at divisional headquarters and I tried to keep clear of the communication trenches, as I knew they would be full of men—a new company was taking over the front line. I thought I'd found a shortcut. It was pitch-dark. Well, I'll skip the details …"

"Didn't you have a gas mask?"

"Certainly. But it was a borrowed one. And I must have adjusted it badly. Or too late. I'd only one idea: to get back to the car. When at last I reached headquarters, I jumped into the car and we started off at once. I'd have done better to stop at the divisional dressing-station and have a thorough gargle with bicarbonate."

"Yes … obviously."

"But I'd no notion that I'd been caught. It was only an hour later that I began to feel a tickling sensation on my neck and under my arms. We got back to Epernay at midnight. I swabbed myself thoroughly with argyrol at once and went to bed. I still thought I'd only had a whiff of it. But the bronchi were more seriously involved than I'd suspected. Wasn't it absurd! I'd gone there to make sure that the necessary precautions were being taken, and like a fool I didn't take them myself!"

"What next?" Philip cut in, and, unable to resist the temptation of showing he had some acquaintance with the subject, added: "Next day I suppose you had trouble with your eyes, digestion, and so on?"

"Not a bit of it. There were hardly any symptoms the next day. Only a slight erythema of the armpits. And a mild irritation of the skin, which did not alarm me in the least. No vesication whatever. But there were deep-seated, insidious affections of the bronchi which weren't detected till some days later. You can guess the sequelae. A series of attacks of laryngitis. Severe bronchitis, followed by sloughing of the tracheal mucous membrane. In fact, the usual effects of the vapour on the respiratory tract. And it's been like that for the last six months."

"And the vocal cords?"

"In a shocking state. You can hear that for yourself. If I'm fairly audible this evening it's because I've been treating my throat all day. Often I have complete aphonia."

"Inflammatory lesions of the vocal cords?"

"No."

"Nervous lesions?"

"No. The aphonia's due to oedema of the inflamed ventricular folds."

"Yes, obviously that would prevent phonation. Did they give you strychnine?"

"As much as a thirtieth of a grain t.i.d. It didn't do the slightest good. But it gave me some gruesome bouts of insomnia."

"How long have you been in the South?"

"Since the beginning of the year. From Epernay they sent me to the base hospital at Montmorillon, then to the place where I am now, Le Mousquier, near Grasse. That was at the end of December. The lung lesions seemed to be healing at that time. But at Le Mousquier they found fibrosis of the lung. My dyspnoea soon became extremely painful and acute. For no apparent reason my temperature jumped up all at once to 103 or 104 and dropped equally suddenly to 99.5. In February I had an attack of dry pleurisy with bloody sputum."

"Do you still have these bouts of pyrexia?"

"Yes."

"To what do you attribute them?"

"To pulmonary infection."

"Remittent infection, you mean?"

"Yes, but it may well be chronic, for all I know."

Their eyes met. In Antoine's flickered an unuttered question. Philip raised his hand. "No, no, Thibault. If *that* is what you're thinking of, you're worrying yourself quite needlessly. There exists no ascertainable connexion between gassing and tuberculosis, so far as I'm aware. You must know that even better than I. A mustard gas case never develops phthisis unless there was a pre-existing tuberculous condition. And you," he added, drawing himself up, "may count yourself one of the lucky ones; you have no pathological background of that nature to contend with, so far as your lungs are concerned."

He beamed on Antoine, who gazed at him in silence for a moment, then gave his old teacher an affectionate look and returned his smile. "Yes, I know. I'm in luck in that respect."

"Then, too," Philip continued in the tone of one thinking aloud, "pulmonary oedema, which, I am told, is a common aftereffect of lung-irritant gases, rarely follows the inhalation of mustard gas. In that respect, too, you're lucky. There's something else. Pulmonary sequels due to mustard gas - are less common and, I believe, less serious as a rule than those due to other poison gases. I read an excellent article on the subject the other day."

"Achard's article?" Antoine made a dubious gesture. "The general belief is that, unlike the asphyxiants, mustard gas attacks the small bronchi rather than the alveoli, and has a less serious effect on the absorption of oxygen. But my personal experience, and such observations as I've made of other cases, don't altogether bear this out. The truth is, I'm sorry to say, that lungs affected by mustard gas develop all sorts of complications, most of which are resistant to treatment and tend to become chronic. Worse still, I've seen some mustard-gas cases in which intra-alveolar sclerosis combined with peribronchial fibrosis was followed by collapse of the lung."

There was a short silence.

"And how's the heart?" Philip asked.

"So far, it's held out—more or less. But for how long can one count on it? It would be folly to expect the myocardium not to show signs of fatigue, when for months it's been bearing the brunt of a fight against toxaemia. In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if the toxjemia isn't already affecting the muscular tissues and nervous system. During the past few weeks I've noticed cardiovascular dysfunction."

"Noticed? In what way."

"Well, I haven't yet been able to arrange for an X-ray examination, and my doctors assure me that they can hear nothing amiss. But how do I know? There are other ways of finding out—by taking my pulse and my blood-pressure, for instance. Well, last week I observed bouts of tachycardia of up to 120 and 135, without a rise in temperature of over 101.3 or 102.2. I shouldn't be surprised if there's some connexion between this rise and the beginning of pulmonary cedema. Don't you agree?"

Philip evaded the question. "Why not make the work of the heart lighter by the frequent use of wet-cups, and even bloodletting now and again?"

Antoine did not seem to have heard. His eyes were riveted on his old teacher. Philip smiled and drew from his vest pocket the fat gold hunter without which Antoine had never seen him. Then he bent forward and—more as if acting from inveterate habit than out of a real desire for information—closed his fingers on Antoine's wrist.

A tedious minute passed. Philip remained unmoving, his eyes fixed on the second hand. Suddenly Antoine started slightly; the sight of that earnest enigmatic face poring over the watch-dial had called back to his memory a long-forgotten incident. One morning

at the hospital, in the early days of his intimacy with Philip, as they were leaving a consulting-room where the Chief had just had to deliver a particularly embarrassing diagnosis, in a burst of unwonted expansiveness he had clutched Antoine's arm and said: "Here's a tip for you, my boy… . When he's up against a critical problem, what a doctor needs above all is a moment to himself to think things out. Well, here's a dodge to get it—and it's never been known to fail. Out with your watch! A doctor should always have something really striking in that line, something big as a saucer, that catches the eye. That watch is his salvation. He can have an anxious family flustering round him, he can be attending the victim of a street accident with the usual crowd of people pestering him with questions —well, if he wants to get a breathing spell, he has only to make that magic gesture, fish out his turnip and take the patient's pulse. A dead silence falls at once; he can ruminate in peace. So long as he keeps his eye glued on the dial, he can weigh pros and cons, think out his diagnosis, as composedly as if he were sitting in his consulting-room, his chin propped on his hand… . So, my dear boy, take my tip—and make haste to buy a large, impressive timepiece."

Philip had not noticed Antoine's slight start. He released the wrist and slowly straightened up. "The pulse is rapid, obviously. And a bit irregular in force. But the rate is steady."

"Just now, perhaps. But some days—especially toward bedtime—it's thready, feeble, almost impalpable. How do you account for that? And whenever the lung condition gets worse, the pulse rate goes up. Paroxysmally as a rule."

"Have you tried pressing on your eyeballs?"

"No use. It doesn't make any difference."

There was another silence. Then Antoine remarked with a forced smile: "I'm already labelled 'pulmonary debility.' The day when I'm labelled 'heart debility' too …!"

Philip cut him short with a wave of his hand. "Nonsense! Hypertension and tachycardia are quite often mere defensive reactions—that's common knowledge, isn't it? For instance, in slight cerebral embolisms—you know it as well as I do—it's by hypertension and tachycardia that the heart puts up a successful fight against the obstruction of the pulmonary circulation. Roger pointed that out first, and it's been confirmed by many subsequent observers."

Antoine made no reply, choked by another paroxysm of coughing.

"What treatments?" Philip asked, but without seeming to attach much importance to his question.

As soon as Antoine got his breath back, he said wearily: "All sorts. We've tried everything. No opiates, naturally. Sulphur … and arsenic. And then sulphur … and arsenic, again and again."

His voice was hoarse, muffled, spasmodic. The strain of talking for so long had been too much; he relapsed into silence. Closing his eyes, he remained motionless for some moments, his head flung back, his shoulders pressed against the rungs of the chair. When he opened his eyes, he perceived Philip's gaze lingering affectionately on him. There was a great gentleness in that look, and Antoine found it more profoundly disturbing than any definite token of anxiety. "You didn't expect to see me looking such a wreck!" he exclaimed impulsively.

"On the contrary," Philip put in at once with a laugh. "After what you told me in your last letter, I didn't expect to see you so far on the road to recovery." Then, rising, he said: "Now I'd like to listen a bit to what is going on inside."

Antoine struggled to his feet and took off his coat.

"We'll do it in the best professional manner, if you don't mind," said Philip cheerfully, pointing to the couch covered with a white sheet on which he had his patients lie.

Antoine complied. Kneeling beside the couch in silence, Philip carried out a thorough auscultation. Then abruptly he rose to his feet. "Well, well!" He adroitly avoided meeting Antoine's anxious gaze. "Certainly there are a few moist rales at various spots. A little fibrosis maybe, and some congestion right up to the apex of the right lung." At last he brought himself to look Antoine in the face. "But you knew that already, didn't you?"

"Yes." Antoine slowly sat up on the couch.

"Obviously." Philip moved with his quick, jerky step to his desk and sat down at it. Mechanically he took a fountain-pen from his pocket, as if about to write a prescription. "There's emphysema undoubtedly. And, to speak quite frankly, I expect the mucous surfaces will give trouble for some time to come." He was fiddling with his pen and, his eyebrows arched, examining absent-mindedly the various objects on the table. "But that's all there is to it," he concluded, closing with a decisive slam the telephone-book which had been lying open on the table.

Antoine rose from the couch, then, resting his palms on the edge of the desk, gazed down earnestly at his old friend. Philip put the cap on his pen, replaced it in his pocket, and, raising his eyes, summed up, weighing his words. "It's an infernal nuisance, my dear boy, I grant you… . But no worse than that."

Antoine drew himself up without a word, then walked to the mirror above the fireplace, and began putting on his collar.

Two discreet taps sounded on the door.

"Dinner's ready," Philip announced briskly. He was still sitting at the desk.

Antoine went up to him and again bent forward, resting his hands on the table. "I assure you, Chief," he said in a weary voice, "I do everything that's humanly possible. Everything. I've given all the known treatments a thorough trial. I study my case clinically as if I were one of my own patients; I've kept up a case-history from the very beginning. And I've had dozens of X-ray examinations, blood-tests, and the rest of it. I think of nothing but my health—how to avoid risks, how to make the most of every treatment." He sighed. "All the same, there are days when one can't help feeling utterly disheartened."

"Nonsense! You tell me yourself that you've noticed signs of improvement."

"Signs of improvement? But I'm far from sure of having noticed any!" Antoine had spoken without thinking, on the spur of the moment. And unconsciously he had raised his voice. No sooner were the words uttered than a sensation of discomfort came over him; it was as if they had suddenly released a lurking thought that he had never yet allowed to reach the level of consciousness. Small beads of sweat formed on his upper lip.

There was no telling if Philip had noticed his friend's discomfiture or guessed what anguish lay behind it. The old professor always kept his feelings well in hand; might not this now account for the unruffled serenity of his look? However, what lingering suspicions .Antoine might have as to Philip's candour were effectively dispelled when he saw his shoulders lift in amiable derision and heard him say cheerfully in his high-pitched, ironical voice: "Do you want to know exactly how I feel about it, my dear boy? Well, I'm vastly

relieved to find your progress is so slow." He paused to relish for a moment Antoine's bewilderment. "Listen! There have been six young men who studied under me whom I'd come to look on almost as my sons; three have been killed, two are maimed for life. And, selfish as it sounds, I don't deny I'm glad to know the sixth is now in safety, nearly a thousand miles from the front, and obliged to stay many months more in the South of France. I haven't the slightest wish to see you cured before the war is over. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, my boy! If you hadn't been gassed last October, who knows if we'd be able to dine together tonight? Which reminds me"—he rose briskly to his feet—"dinner's waiting for us in the next room."

His old friend's cheerfulness was infectious, and Antoine thought, as he followed him out: He's right. My constitution's sound as a bell, and it'll see me through… .

A plate of soup was steaming on the table. For many years Philip's dinner had consisted of soup and stewed fruit only.

A cup and a jug of milk stood in front of Antoine's seat.

"Denis hasn't warmed your milk, but he can heat it up in a moment, if you like."

"No, I always drink it cold, thanks."

"Sugar?"

A paroxysm of coughing prevented Antoine from replying; he merely shook his head. Philip refrained from looking at him. He judged it best to take no notice, and, at the first opportunity, to give their conversation a new turn. Meanwhile, waiting for the coughing fit to end, he stirred his soup meditatively. At last, to end a silence that was getting on the nerves of both, he began speaking, in a tone as natural as he could make it. "I've spent another strenuous day wrangling with our Hygiene Service. You'd never believe the muddle they are in, our official regulations for typhoid immunization."

Antoine smiled, and drank some milk to ease his throat. "Still, Chief, you've put in some grand work in that department during the last three years."

"It was uphill work, I can assure you!" He groped for another topic, failed to find one, and continued. "Yes, uphill work, indeed! When I was asked in 1915 to reorganize the Army Medical Service, you simply can't imagine the state of things I found!"

"Oh, yes, I can!" Antoine all but exclaimed. "I was in the thick of it!" But he was careful to avoid talking as far as possible, and confined himself to listening with an understanding smile.

"At that time," Philip went on, "casualties were evacuated in ordinary trains, which had brought up troops or supplies to the line. Often as not in cattle-cars! With my own eyes I saw poor devils who had had to wait twenty-four hours in a freezing railway-car because there weren't enough casualties to make up a train of the regulation length. For food they usually had to depend on what the people of the locality provided. Their wounds were dressed by well-meaning ladies with the most rudimentary ideas of first-aid work or by aged local pharmacists. And when at last the train got under way they often had two or three days of it, before they were finally lifted off their straw beds. You can guess the percentage of tetanus cases we had in almost every trainload. Those who survived were bundled into overcrowded hospitals, which were short of everything: antiseptics, bandages, and, needless to say, rubber gloves."

"I remember seeing, two or three miles behind the lines"—Antoine had difficulty in getting the words out—"operating-stations … in which they boiled the forceps … in dirty old saucepans … over a wood fire."

"Well, that could be passed over, in a pinch." Philip gave one of his short, whinnying laughs. "They were run off their feet. The supply was greater than the demand, the war was not conforming to official forecasts and overdoing its ravages. But what was inexcusable"—his voice was serious again—"was the way in which the mobilization of our medical men was planned and conducted. From the first day the army had available a great number of really first-rate medical officers. Well, when I did my first round of inspection I found such eminent practitioners as Deutsch and Hallouin serving as second-grade orderlies in ambulance units commanded by army medical officers thirty years old or less. The men at the head of our principal medical services were perfect ignoramuses. One had the impression they'd never used the knife on anything more serious than a whitlow, but simply because they were colonels they'd order and, worse still, perform the most serious operations. On the vaguest grounds they'd insist on amputation, and refuse to listen to the advice of the civilian medical men—even hospital surgeons of wide experience—whom they had under their orders. Yes, we had our work cut out, I and my colleagues! It took us months to get the least reform made in the system. We had to move heaven and earth to get the regulations amended so that the wounded should be treated by professional doctors. Equally hard it was to dispose of that absurd practice of filling the most distant hospitals to start with, regardless of the severity and urgency of individual cases. They thought nothing of entraining men with cranial injuries to Bordeaux or Perpignan; naturally gangrene or tetanus finished most of them off *en route*—poor fellows who might have been saved in nine cases out of ten, if they'd been trephined within twelve hours of being wounded."

Suddenly his anger subsided and he smiled. "You'll never guess who helped me when I started my campaign! One of your patients, my dear boy. You know, the mother of that little girl we put in plaster years ago, you and I, and sent to Berck… ."

"You mean—er—Mme. de Battaincourt?" Antoine said in some confusion.

"Yes. You wrote to me about her—don't you remember?—in 1914."

It came back to Antoine that, on learning that Mary, Huguette's English governess, had left her charge abruptly and returned to England on the outbreak of war, he had asked Philip to keep an eye on his little patient. Philip had gone to Berck, and formed the opinion that there was now no risk in her returning to a more less normal life.

"I saw Mme. de Battaincourt on several occasions about that time. That woman seems to know all the bigwigs in Paris. Within twenty-four hours she'd fixed up for me an interview that I'd been vainly trying to arrange for during the previous six weeks; what's more, thanks to her, I was able to talk freely to the great man himself, to show him through the documents I'd brought and generally to have things out with him. That interview took the best part of two hours—and it proved a turning-point."

Antoine said nothing. He was staring at his empty cup with a quite uncalled-for earnestness; suddenly aware of this, he made haste to replenish it with milk.

"She's grown into a very pretty girl, has your young protege," said Philip, who was surprised that Antoine had made no inquiries about Huguette. "I've kept in touch with her. She comes to see me every three or four months."

Still uncomfortably wondering if Philip knew of his liaison with Huguette's mother, Antoine knew that it was up to him to say something. "Is she living in Touraine?" he asked.

"No, in Versailles, with her stepfather. Battaincourt's settled there so as to be near Paris. Chatenaud is treating him. Rotten luck he's had, poor Battaincourt!"

No, Antoine thought, he doesn't know, or he'd have avoided talking of his rotten luck.

"Did you hear," Philip went on, "how he got wounded?"

"Only vaguely. It happened when he was on leave, didn't it?"

"He'd put in two years in the front line, without a scratch. And then one night, when he was travelling to Paris on forty-eight hours' leave, his train stopped at the sorting station, Saint-Just-en-Chaussee. Just at that moment, some Boche planes came over and dropped their bombs on the station. When they hauled him out of the wreckage his face was cut to pieces, one eye gone and the other in a very bad way. Chatenaud is doing all he can for him; he's practically blind, you know."

Antoine recalled Simon's clear, forthright gaze and the impression it had made on him when they had met at his place just before the war started; it was that meeting which had led him to break with Anne. "Do you know"—his voice was so weak that Philip had to lean toward him—"do you know if Mme. de Battaincourt is living with them?"

"No. She's in America."

"Really?" He was surprised at his feeling of relief on hearing this news.

Philip, smiling to himself, watched Denis place on the table a bowl of stewed cherries. Then he slowly helped himself, keeping silent till the servants had left the room. "The mother … a queer sort of creature, by all accounts." He paused, his spoon in air. "What's your idea of her?"

Again Antoine asked himself: "Does he know …?" Tongue-tied, he conjured up a fleeting smile. In Philip's company he always lost his self-assurance, became once more the young medical student overawed by his professor.

"Yes," Philip went on, "she's in the States. Last time I saw Huguette she said: 'Mamma's going to live in New York; she has lots of friends there.' From information I've picked up in various quarters, I gather she was sent there on a 'special mission,' for propaganda work of sorts. And that this 'special mission' synchronized exactly with the recall to the U.S.A. of a certain American officer who'd held a post at the Paris embassy for some time."

No, Antoine decided, he certainly doesn't know… .

Philip spat out some cherry-stones, wiped his beard, and continued: "That, anyhow, is what Lebel told me. Lebel, you know, is running the hospital that Mme. de Battaincourt built on her estate near Tours; I understand she still continues to subsidize it—most handsomely. But one must take what Lebel says with a grain of salt. Rumour has it that he too, for all his grey hair, was once a very intimate collaborator of the lady's. That would explain why he threw everything up and went and buried himself in Touraine soon after the outbreak of war… . Won't you finish your milk?"

"Thanks, two cups are the most I can manage," Antoine smiled. "I hate milk, really!"

Philip did not insist, folded his napkin clumsily, and rose. "Let's go back to my sanctum!" He linked his arm affectionately in Antoine's and, as he led him back to the study, went on talking. "You saw the peace terms imposed on Rumania by the Central Powers? Significant, eh? It means that they're supplied with all the oil they need. Oh, they're in velvet just now. Why should they want to make peace?"

"For the good reason that the American army is coming into action."

"I wouldn't bank too much on that! If they don't bring off a decisive victory this summer—which is unlikely, though it's thought they mean to make another drive on Paris—well, by next year they'll have Russian troops and war material to offset the American troops and war material. And what is to be expected when there are two approximately equal forces pitted against each other, neither of which is strong enough to crush the adversary? Only one thing is possible: they'll go on fighting until both sides are equally and utterly exhausted."

"How about Wilson? Don't you think anything will come of his very sensible proposals?"

"Wilson might be living in another planet for all he knows about this war! And, anyway, at present there's not the slightest sign that anyone in England or in France wants peace. (I'm speaking of the leaders.) In Paris and in London they're out for *victory* at all costs; any talk of peace is branded treachery. People like Briand are under a cloud, and so will Wilson be—if he isn't already!"

"Still, peace may be forced on them." Antoine was thinking of what Rumelles had said.

"I don't believe Germany will ever be in a position to impose peace on us. No, I repeat, in my opinion, the opposing forces are more or less equally matched, and I don't see any other issue of the war than complete exhaustion on both sides."

He had seated himself again in his chair behind the desk, after amiably waving Antoine toward the couch, on which he stretched himself only too readily.

"We may live," Philip continued, "to see the end of the war. But what we shall not live to see is—peace. I mean a stability in European relations that can be counted on to last." Slightly flustered, he caught himself up. "I said 'we,' young though you are, because, to my thinking, it will take several generations to achieve that stability." Again he paused, shot a discreet glance at Antoine, stroked his beard abstractedly, then went on, with a gesture of discouragement: "Is a stable peace even to be thought of under present conditions? This war has been a nasty blow for the democratic ideal. Sembat was right: democracies aren't made for war; they melt, like wax in an oven, when a war breaks. And the longer the war lasts, the less chance Europe has of remaining, or becoming, democratic. One can easily picture such men as Clemenceau or Lloyd George playing the despot in their respective countries when the war is over. The people won't protest; they're broken in to martial law. And gradually they'll surrender even their pet 'republican' pretensions to sovereignty. Just look at what's happening in France: the distribution of foodstuffs is state-controlled, consumption is rationed, officialdom's rampant in every field of action, in trade and industry; it controls private enterprise with the moratorium and freedom of thought with the censorship. We put up with all these things as emergency measures; we persuade ourselves they're unavoidable in wartime. To my mind they're premonitory symptoms of the total servitude that's coming; and once people are well inured to the yoke, there'll be no shaking it off."

"Did you ever meet Studler, 'the Caliph,' as we called him, one of my collaborators?"

"That Jew, you mean, with a big Assyrian beard and a mahatma's eyes?"

"Yes. He was wounded, and now he's somewhere on the Salonika front. From which he sends me now and then prophetic homilies, in his peculiar vein. Well, Studler declares that the war will lead inevitably to Revolution with a capital R. First in the vanquished

countries, then in the victorious ones. Whether by force or gradually, Revolution's bound to spread, he says, to every nation."

Philip gave a noncommittal grunt.

"He predicts," Antoine continued, "a breakdown of the modern world, the collapse of capitalism. He, too, thinks the war will go on till Europe's exhausted. But when everything's been swept away or levelled flat, a better world, he says, will come into being. From the ruins of our civilization he sees a new order arising, a sort of world confederation, which will organize collectively all the life on our planet, on an entirely new basis."

He had had to force his voice toward the end of this long bout of talking. A fit of coughing doubled him up. Philip, without seeming to take notice, observed each movement.

"Anything may happen!" He always enjoyed giving his imagination a run, and there was a glint of amused interest in his eye. "After all, why not? Perhaps the simple faith of '89 which led us to fly in the face of every biological fact and claim that all men are absolutely equal and should be treated as such by the laws—perhaps that simple faith, which saw us through a century, has worked itself out and is destined to give place to some other damnfool notion, equally attractive and equally absurd! A new ideology which in its turn will inspire thinkers and reformers, and with which humanity will dope itself—till further notice. Till the wheel comes full circle once again."

He kept silent for some moments while Antoine went on coughing. When he spoke again there was an undertone of irony in his voice. "It's not impossible. But I'll leave these roseate dreams to your oriental friend. The future which I foresee is much nearer and much less roseate. I don't believe any government will be ready to give up the absolute power that this war has granted it. And I'm afraid the age of liberalism is over and will not return for many a long year. Which, I admit, is a hard blow for men of my generation. We were so absolutely sure that it had come to stay, our democratic freedom, and that such questions could never be reopened. But every question, at every time, can be reopened. Perhaps we too were dreamers. Perhaps at the close of the nineteenth century we took our dreams for durable realities because we had the good luck to be living in an exceptionally calm and prosperous period of history."

He was speaking in the jarring, rather nasal voice which was so apt to disconcert his hearers; his elbows were resting on the arms of his chair, his long, reddish nose pointing toward his linked hands, and his eyes fixed on his fingers, which he was clasping and unclasping in nervous little jerks. He seemed to be talking to himself.

"We thought mankind had cut its wisdom teeth. We fancied we were nearing an age in which common sense, moderation, and mutual forbearance would at last prevail throughout the world; in which intelligence would control the evolution of the social organism. Who knows if, in the years to come, historians won't write us down as a generation of fools and simpletons who gulled themselves with wishful thinking, with illusions about man and his capacity for civilization? Perhaps we deliberately shut our eyes to certain innate qualities of the race. For instance, it may well be that the destructive instinct, a periodically recurring impulse to smash to pieces all we have laboriously built up, is one of the fundamental laws that limit the creative possibilities of human nature—one of those mysterious and disheartening first principles which the sociologist has to take into account and reckon with… . But it's a far cry from that viewpoint to the forecasts of your friend the Caliph!" he added with a chuckle. Antoine, he noticed, was still worried by his cough: "Sure you wouldn't like a drink? A glass of water? A dose of codeine?"

Antoine shook his head. After two or three minutes, during which Philip paced the room in silence, he felt a little better. Then, straightening up, he wiped away the tears which were rolling down his cheeks and forced his mouth into a smile. His features were drawn and darkly suffused with blood, his forehead beaded with sweat.

"I think … I'll be going … Chief," he panted; each word rasped his throat like fire. "Sorry …" He smiled again, and with an effort rose to his feet. "I'm in a damned bad way … you can't deny it!"

Philip did not seem to have heard. "This habit of prophesying!" he exclaimed. "I may jeer at your Caliph, but I've been going on exactly like him. It's a fool's game, anyhow. Everything we've seen happening during the last four years has been absurd. And whatever these absurdities lead us to predict is equally absurd. One can criticize, I grant you. One can even damn the state of things. (That, anyway, isn't absurd.) But as for predicting what is going to come of it—it's mere waste of breath. Don't forget this, my dear boy, there's no getting away from it: the only—I was going to say 'scientific' method, but let's be more modest—the only rational method, the only one that doesn't play you false, is the tracking down of error, *not* the search for truth. It's none too easy to discern what's false, but it *can* be done; and it's the utmost, literally the utmost, one can do. All the rest is … moonshine."

Noticing that Antoine was on his feet and listening absently, he too rose. "When shall I see you again? When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning at eight."

Philip gave a slight start. He waited a moment to be sure his voice was steady before murmuring: "So soon!"

As he followed Antoine out of the room, his eyes were fixed on the bent back, the lean, scraggy neck emerging from the coat-collar. And he was seized with fear, fear of betraying himself, of the silence that had fallen on them, of his own thoughts. Hastily he jerked out a string of questions: "Anyhow, are you satisfied with the hospital? Is the staff efficient? Do you think the climate agrees with you?"

"For the winter, nothing could be better," Antoine replied, still walking ahead. "But I dread the summer there. So much so that I think I'll apply for a transfer. What I need is the country. A brisk climate, without humidity. Somewhere in the pines, perhaps. Arcachon might do, only it's so hot. How about some place in the Pyrenees—one of the spas, Cauterets or Luchon, for instance?"

He had entered the hall and was reaching toward the hat-peg, when he turned round rather abruptly and asked: "What do you advise, Chief?" And suddenly, gazing at that face on which, during the ten years they had worked side by side, he had learned to read as in an open book each fleeting change of mood, he had a glimpse in the small grey eyes, blinking behind the glasses, of an involuntary avowal -—a vast compassion. Philip's look, his whole expression, seemed to be saying: "What's the good? What difference can it make where you spend the summer? Your case is hopeless—and there is no escape."

"Good God!" Antoine all but cried aloud, so brutal was the shock. But then he told himself: 'Way down deep I too knew it: I knew there was no hope.

"Quite so … Cauterets," Philip mumbled nervously; then, pulling himself together: "Or why not simply Touraine? Or Anjou, for that matter?"

Antoine was staring at the oor; he dared no longer meet the eyes in which he had read his death-sentence. How false the Chief's voice rang! he thought. Horrible! With a trembling hand he put on his service-cap, then walked to the door, without looking up. His one idea now was to cut short their leave-taking, to be left alone—alone to grapple with the thing of dread within him. "Yes, Touraine. Or Anjou,"
Philip repeated feebly. "I'll make inquiries. I'll write to you…"
His eyes still downcast under the cap-peak, whose shadow hid the discomposure of his face, mechanically Antoine held out his hand. The old doctor grasped it; a watery little click came from his lips. Freeing his hand, Antoine opened the door and hurried out. Leaning over the banisters, Philip quavered after him: "Yes. Why not try Anjou …?"

# Chapter XIV

OUTSIDE, the city was plunged in darkness. Hooded street-lamps, few and far between, cast pools of bluish light upon the sidewalk. The streets were almost empty. Now and then, but rarely, a car glided cautiously by, honking insistently.

Walking unsteadily, hardly knowing where he was, Antoine crossed the Boulevard Malesherbes and entered the Rue Boissy-d'Anglas. His shoulders sagged, his breath came in short gasps, his head seemed hollow and full of echoes, like a sounding-box. He walked so close alongside the house-fronts that at times he scraped the walls with his elbow. A vast indifference had settled on him; a respite of no thoughts, no pain.

When he grew conscious of his whereabouts, he found he was under the trees in the Avenue des Champs-Elysees. In front of him, beyond the tree-trunks, lay the Place de la Concorde, dimly lit but bathed in the starry radiance of the soft spring night and crisscrossed by the moving shapes of cars that slunk out of the shadows like animals with glowing eyes and receded into darkness. Noticing a bench, he went toward it; instinctively, before sitting down, he checked himself. "Mustn't catch cold!" Only to retort forthwith: "What can that matter—now?" The presage he had glimpsed in Philip's eyes, in a flash of cruel insight, possessed his mind; more than that, it had invaded his body, too, and like a monstrous parasitic growth, a gnawing tumour, was driving out all else before its vast proliferation.

His back propped against the hard boards, his arms locked on his chest as if to constrict this foreign body lodged within him and eating out his life, he ran over in his mind the incidents of the past few hours. He saw the Chief straddling his chair, heard his opening remark: "Let's begin at the beginning. Your first wound—has it healed all right?" and methodically recapitulated the answers he had made. But gradually the words he heard himself using became slightly different from what he had actually said; he now set forth his case in its true light, with the precision and detachment that had been lacking in his previous version. In all their inexorable reality he described his successive attacks, the ever-shortening periods of remission, and the relapses more serious every time. He made clear the steady, irremediable aggravation of his malady. And with his mind's eye he saw how, as his narrative proceeded, the anxiety on his old friend's face grew more and more apparent till plain as a spoken word it voiced a clear prognosis: death… . Antoine's breath was coming in laboured gasps; his face was clammy with sweat; drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he mopped his brow.

Suddenly in the distance a long-drawn ululation rose and fell across the silent darkness; but he heard it vaguely, as in a dream.

He was visualizing himself on the couch, the examination ended, rising laboriously to the sitting position and shaking his head with feigned resignation. "No, Chief, you see it for yourself, I haven't a dog's chance!" And Philip stared at the floor without replying.

To shake off the stifling oppression that was gaining on him, he scrambled to his feet. And as he stood unmoving in the darkness there crossed his mind, like a waft of purer air from the abyss, a consoling thought: "We doctors, anyhow, always have a way out—a means of cutting short suspense and suffering."

His legs were giving way beneath him; he sat down again.

Two shadowy forms, two women, dashed out from underneath the trees. A second later all together all the sirens of the city were blaring in a shrill cacophony, and the few lights dotting the Place de la Concorde went out abruptly.

"The crowning touch!" He smiled to himself sardonically.

He listened attentively. A faint drumming filled the air. From the paths behind him came sounds of hurrying feet, of scared, excited voices; suddenly a little group of frightened people ran by helter-skelter and vanished into the night. Cars, all lights out, were speeding down the Avenue Gabriel, hooting loudly. A police squad doubled past. He remained seated, his shoulders hunched, staring into the darkness, lost in a dream, indifferent to all human concerns.

Some minutes passed before his mind began to march again. The dull thuds of distant explosions, followed by an intermittent roll of gunfire, roused him from his coma. "Those must be the batteries on Mount Valérien," he thought. … It came back to him that Rumelles had mentioned an air-raid shelter not far away, in the Admiralty building.

The boom of guns persisted in the distance. Rising, he began to walk toward the Concorde, but halted at the sidewalk's edge. The night sky of Paris had waked to vivid life; from all points of the compass searchlights were playing on the zenith, peopling the blue, star-strewn vault with wraithlike gleams that swerved and clashed and circled in a mazy dance—sometimes pausing suddenly to peer, like questing eyes, into a nook of darkness, then swinging off again upon their wayward course.

He could not bring himself to step off the sidewalk onto the road, but remained gazing up till his neck ached with the strain. If only I could lie down, he thought, and close my eyes! Might take a sleeping-powder. Yes … sleep! But an invincible lassitude weighed on him; his limbs seemed paralysed. Better be getting back. A taxi? No; the huge square was lifeless, empty, plunged in darkness. Now and again as a searchlight raked the sky overhead, it emerged momently from the gloom, and he had a fleeting glimpse of balustrades, palely glimmering statues, the Obelisk and fountains, ringed by tall, spectral lampposts; and he seemed to be gazing on the city of a dream, a place on which a curse had fallen, leaving it for ever desolate; an ancient capital lost in the desert sands.

With an effort he overcame his torpor and, moving mechanically like a sleepwalker, set out across this city of the dead, heading straight for the Obelisk, so as to reach the angle formed by the Tuileries Gardens and the bank of the Seine. It seemed interminable, this lonely walk across a lunar landscape under a sky seething with livid light. A group of Belgian soldiers dashed past him. Then an elderly couple, arms locked clumsily round each other's waist, blundered across his path, flotsam drifting through the night. The man shouted: "There's a shelter in the subway station. Over there!" It did not occur to him to answer till they were out of sight.

The air was pulsing with the sounds of unseen engines merged into one vast, clangorous roar. To the east an anti-aircraft barrage was in full blast and the sky full of bursting shells; every minute or so another battery, nearer each time, was coming into action. The veering shafts of light made it impossible to see the shell-bursts. Suddenly he heard, between the crashes of the guns, a rattle of machine-guns… . He decided to make a move in the direction of the Pont Royal.

Not a vehicle was in sight as he groped his way along the embankment. Not a light. Not a living being. Under the frenzied sky the world lay void as a dead planet. He was alone—alone with the wide, calm river, softly, serenely luminous as a quiet country stream under a starry sky.

As for a moment he halted, a new thought pierced the twilight of his mind. "I've known it all along; I *knew* quite well that I was doomed." Then he walked on again, unthinking, like an automaton.

The din had grown so incessant that there was no distinguishing the nature of the sounds. Then suddenly the dull thud of an explosion drowned all other noises. More followed. Bombs, he thought. They've got through the barrage. In the far distance, toward the Louvre, black rows of chimney-pots leaped into view against a pink glow spreading up the sky. Looking round, he saw other fires kindling—in the Levallois and Puteaux suburbs, he judged by the direction. "The whole city's ablaze." He had forgotten his own affliction. Under the vague, unseen menace brooding in the heavens like the blind wrath of a vindictive god, a morbid exhilaration set the blood coursing in his veins, a rush of fierce resentment gave him back his strength. Quickening his pace, he soon came to the bridge, crossed the Seine, and turned into the Rue du Bac. In the inky darkness of the narrow street, he tripped over a refuse-box, and the sharp effort he had to make to right himself sent a stab of pain through his chest. Stepping off the sidewalk, he set his course by the ribbon of light-swept sky above, between the house-tops.

There was a sudden clangor in the streets behind; he had just time to spring back to the sidewalk before two monstrous engines hurtled by, without lights and followed by a car flying a pennon. A voice beside him said: "The fire brigade." Antoine saw the dim form of a man sheltering in a doorway. Every few seconds he craned his neck forward and glanced up at the sky, as if to see whether a shower was ending.

Without a word Antoine started on his way again. His weariness had come back, and he struggled painfully ahead, like a man towing a barge, laden with his obsession. "I knew it. I've known it all along." In his distress was no surprise; he was more like a man staggering beneath a heavy load than one who has just been dealt a blow. That intimation of the worst had found a niche all ready for it in his mind; what he had read in Philip's eyes had done no more than lift a tacit embargo, set free a thought that had been lurking, full formed, for many a month in the secret places of his consciousness.

At the corner of the Rue de l'Université, a few steps from his house, a sudden apprehension gripped him, a panic fear of the solitude awaiting him at home. He hesitated, on the brink of flight. Unthinkingly he had lifted his eyes toward the lurid sky while searching his mind for someone with whom he could take refuge, someone to bestow the solace of a pitying glance.

Then, "No one …!" he murmured.

For several minutes he remained thus, leaning against a wall, while the boom of guns, the drone of aeroplanes, crashes of bursting bombs, beat on his weary brain—pondering on the inexplicable fact that he had not a friend on earth. Yet he had always been sociable, obliging; he had won the liking of his patients, been popular with fellow-students and appreciated by his teachers. More, there had been women in his life who had loved him passionately. And yet he had not a friend, had never had one. Not even Jacques… . "Jacques died before I'd learned to make a friend of him."

Suddenly his thoughts turned to Rachel. How good it would have been to have her now with him, in this black hour, and to hear, close in his ears, her voice tender and soft as a caress, whispering: "My Toine … my darling!" Where was she? What had become of her? The necklace … he had it at home. A desire came over him to fondle it between his palms and feel the honey-golden beads grow warm under his touch, like living flesh, and, drinking in their fragrance, dream she was nestling in his arms.

With an effort he drew away from the wall and stumblingly covered the few yards between it and his door.

## A BATCH OF LETTERS

*Maisons, May 16, 1918.*

The shell which smashed my leg did more; it made of me—a sexless being. I couldn't bring myself to tell you this when you were here. But, being a doctor, you may have guessed it. When we were talking about Jacques and I told you I envied his lot, you looked at me in a curious way.

Please burn this letter; I don't want anyone to know, and I'd loathe being pitied. I've saved my skin, and my pension gives me enough to live on; many would say I'm one of the lucky ones, and I dare say they'd be right. So long as Mother lives, I'll stick it out; but if, later on, I decide to disappear, you will know why, and you'll be the only one to know it.

A lw ays yo urs,

D. F.

*Maisons-Laffitte, May 23.*

Dear Antoine,

This isn't a reproach, but we are getting rather anxious; you promised to write, and a whole week has gone by without a line from you. I cannot help fearing the long railway journey may have proved more trying than we expected.

I would like to tell you all that your visit and our talk together meant to me. But I don't know how to say that sort of thing—just as I cannot show my feelings at such moments. So I'll say only this: since you left, it seems to me that I am lonelier than ever.

Very affection ately yo urs ,

Jenny.

*Maisons-Laffitte, Saturday, June 8, 1918.*

Dear Antoine,

The days are passing, three weeks have gone by since you left Maisons—and still not a line from you. I am beginning to be seriously alarmed; I can attribute this long silence only to the state of your health; please write and tell me exactly how things stand.

Little Paul has had an attack of tonsillitis with high fever for several days; he is getting better but still has to stay in bed—which rather complicates life at the hostel. Just imagine, everyone here says he has grown much taller during the week in bed! That's hardly possible, is it? I have an impression, too, that his intelligence has developed during his short illness. He makes-up all sorts of stories to explain the pictures in his picture-books and the sketches Daniel makes for him. Please don't laugh—I wouldn't dare to say it to anyone else—but I really think Paul is exceptionally observant for a child of his age and that he will be very intelligent later on.

Otherwise we've no news. Orders have been sent to the hospital to evacuate as many convalescents as possible to make room for newcomers, and we have had to send away a number of poor fellows who had been reckoning on another ten days' or a fortnight's peace and quiet. New cases are pouring in daily; Mamma has got the English people who own the little house next door—the one with the wistaria on the porch—to lend it to her. That means another twenty beds, perhaps more. Nicole has had a letter from her husband; his motor-ambulance unit has left Champagne and been transferred to the Belfort sector. He says that our losses on the Champagne front were simply appalling. How long will it go on? Will this nightmare never end? Some friends of ours at Maisons who go to Paris daily say that the repeated bombardments are beginning to tell on the morale of the population.

Dear Antoine, even if your news is of a serious relapse, do please tell me the truth, and don't leave us any longer in this dreadful uncertainty.

Your friend,

Jenny.

*Grasse, 6/11/18.*

State of health unsatisfactory, but so far no definite aggravation. Will write in a few days.

Affectionately,

Thibault.

*The Mousquier, 6/18/18.*

At last, my dear Jenny, I bring myself to write to you. You were right in fearing the long journey had been too much for me. No sooner was I back than I had a rather serious relapse, with alarming fluctuations of temperature. New and drastic methods of treatment seem to have staved off the progress of the disease once more. For the last week I've been up and about again, and gradually getting back to my old way of life.

But my silence was not due to this relapse. You ask me to tell you the truth. Here it is: something has happened to me, something terrible and unforeseen; I've learned, I've realized, that my case is *hopeless*. Definitely hopeless. I shall probably linger on a few months more. But, whatever is done, I cannot possibly recover.

One has to have been through the mill to realize what that means. And, faced with such a certitude, one feels the whole world crumbling under one's feet.

Forgive me for having told you this so bluntly. But when a man knows he is going to die, everything else becomes so trivial, so … irrelevant.

Not up to writing any more today. Will write again soon.

Affectionately yours,

Antoine.

P.S. Would you please keep this news strictly to yourself.

*Le Mousquier, 6/22/18.*

No, my dear Jenny, it is not as you think (or pretend to think); what I am up against is not a sick man's fancy. I should have given more details—but I did not feel up to it. Today I'll try to be more explicit.

What I am facing is something very real; a certainty. It forced itself upon me the day I left you, the last day I spent in Paris, in the course of a visit to my old teacher Dr. Philip. I suppose it was his presence that led me suddenly to look at my case for the first time from a strictly professional viewpoint, and to make an impardal, logical diagnosis, as I would have done for a patient. And then, like a lightning-flash, the truth forced itself upon me.

During my railway journey I had only too much time to review my case. I had with me the daily notes I have been making from the start, and they enabled me to trace day by day, through its recurrent ups and downs, the steady worsening of my condition. I also had with me the digest I compiled last winter of almost all the clinical observations and case-reports, French and English, that have appeared in technical reviews since gas was first used in warfare. I knew it all already, but suddenly I saw things in a new light. Everything pointed to the same conclusion. Once I was back here, I discussed my case with the specialists who are treating it. Not, as formerly, from the viewpoint of a patient who thinks himself on the way to recovery and snatches at every favourable symptom, but as a competent, well-informed colleague who is no longer to be fobbed off with kindly lies. It did not take me long to corner them; I very soon had them shirking direct answers, making partial admissions, or relapsing into a silence which told me more than words.

My prognosis, now, is solidly established. Given the progress of the toxaemia during the past ten months, and the mischief it has done, I have no longer any chance, none whatever, of recovery. Not even of staying in an intermediate, chronic state which would keep me an invalid for the rest of my days. No, I'm like a ball set rolling down a hill that can't help rolling quicker and quicker till it reaches the bottom. Isn't it absurd that I, a doctor, should have humbugged myself like that, and for so long! I can't fix a time-limit—that depends on future attacks (there's no preventing them) and their severity, and on my periods of respite. This business of dying by degrees may last from two months to a year, at the most; it is a matter of chance, according to my relapses and the temporary relief I get from different treatments. But it will all come to the same thing in the end; and the end is near. In some cases there exists a hope of what you'd call a miracle; in my case, none. At its present stage of development, the science of medicine is unable to do anything for me. Please understand that I am not writing this as an invalid who puts his chances at their blackest in the hope of provoking a comforting rejoinder; no, I am writing as a clinician who knows his subject and has detected a malady definitely recognized as fatal. If I can write in this calm, detached manner, it is because …

*June 23*—I resume this letter at the point where I broke off yesterday. I haven't yet got myself sufficiently in hand to keep my attention fixed on anything over a long period. I cannot remember how I meant to end that phrase. I wrote "calm, detached." That relative calmness in the face of the inevitable—a far from stable calm, unfortunately—has come to me only after a phase of appalling mental agony.

Day after day, night after night—sleepless, interminable nights—I lived in an abyss of horror, endured the torments of the damned. Even to think of it now makes me break out in a cold sweat, sends shudders down my spine. Nobody can imagine what it's like. How does one manage to keep one's reason? And how, by what mysterious processes, does one succeed in forcing one's way through that tempest of revolt and anguish, and reaching the state of resignation I am in now? Explanation is beyond me. It would seem that, once a fact is proved, a rationalist mind cannot but yield to it, unconditionally. And it seems, too, that the capacity of human nature for adapting itself to circumstance must be prodigious to enable a man to get used even to the idea that he is going to be done out of life before he has had time to live, doomed to vanish from the earth before he has realized a fraction of the vast possibilities that he believed were his.

But I cannot now recall the various stages of this change that gradually came over me. It was a long process. Presumably the paroxysms of utter despair alternated with phases of prostration; otherwise they would have been unbearable. This transition period covered several weeks, during which physical pain and the worries of looking after my health were the only things that took my mind off the other, the *real*, suffering. Little by little the stranglehold relaxed. There was nothing stoical, heroic, or in the least like resignation, in my new state of mind. It was rather that my capacity of feeling had been exhausted, bringing on an enfeeblement of my responses, a growing indifference or, more precisely, anaesthesia. My reason played no part in this. Nor did my will. The only use to which I've put my will has been (during these last few days) to try to prolong this state of apathy. Just now I am doing all I can to pick up, one by one, the broken threads of normal life. I am renewing contact with the people around me. I force myself to have my meals with the others; I keep out of my bedroom as much as possible. Today for quite a while I watched some of the men here playing bridge. And this afternoon I find I can write to you without too much effort. With, indeed, a new and curious zest. I've come out of doors to finish this letter and am sitting in the shade of a row of cypress trees, behind which the hospital orderlies are at their usual Sunday game of bowls. I had imagined that their proximity, the noise they make—laughing, squabbling, *etc.*—would be too much for me. But I made up my mind to stick it out, and I've succeeded. So, you see, I am on the way (apparently) to a new mental equilibrium.

All the same, I admit these efforts have exhausted me a bit. I'll write to you again. As far as my mind is capable of being interested in others, all my thoughts are for you and your little son.

Antoine.

*Le Mousquier, 6/28/18.*

I've read your letter several times this morning, my dear Jenny. It's not merely simple and delightful. It is exactly as I would have wished it. As I would have wished *you* to be; as I had always felt you were. I have waited till night came, till all was silence in the hospital, to write to you. At this hour the treatments are over, the night orderly has made his last round, and one is alone—alone with the prospect of another sleepless night, alone with one's ghosts… . Thanks to you I feel I have more—I was going to write "courage." But courage isn't what I mean, nor do I need it. What I need, perhaps, is a presence at my side; I need to feel less utterly alone in these long months of mental stock-taking that seemingly lie ahead. And, strange as it may sound, I can face them now without wishing them a day shorter. I'm surprised at myself. As you may guess, the means of putting an end to it are always at my disposal—but I am reserving that for later on. For the present, I accept the respite; in fact, I cling to it. Queer, isn't it? The truth is, I suppose, that when a man has been so passionately in love with life as I was, it's hard for him to break with it—and especially so when he feels life slipping through his fingers. In a tree struck by lightning, the sap goes on rising for several successive springs, the roots take years to die.

But, Jenny, there was one thing I missed in that delightful letter: news of your little one. You mentioned him only once, in a previous letter. When I got it I was still in a state of such utter despondency and indifference to everything that I left it unopened for a day or more. When I did open it, my eyes fell on the lines where you talked of Paul, and for the first time I managed for a moment to shake off my obsession, to break the vicious circle of my thoughts and direct my interest to something outside myself—to regain contact with the world of men. And since then Paul has been often in my mind. At Maisons I saw him, touched him, heard him laugh—I can still feel his little muscles throbbing under my fingers. I need only think of him to conjure up his presence. And round him certain notions are crystallizing, plans for the future. It's curious, the craving a man feels, even when a sentence of death has been passed on him, to make plans and to foster hopes. I need only remind myself that this child exists, stands on the threshold of tomorrow with a brand-new life before him, and suddenly all sorts of vistas, forbidden ground to me, open up before my eyes. A sick man's fancies, perhaps. No matter; nowadays I've less aversion than I used to have for "sentimentalizing." (That, assuredly, is an effect of illness!) I sleep so little. And I don't want to have recourse to drugs yet awhile; I shall need them only too sorely, later on.

I am systematically pursuing my efforts to readapt myself. They involve a training of the will, which in itself is beneficial. I have started reading the newspapers again. The war news; von Kiihlmann's speech in the Reichstag. He says—very properly, to my mind—that peace will never be feasible between people who persist in regarding every proposal made by the enemy as a "trap," an attempt to undermine "morale." Once again the Allied press is giving public opinion a wrong lead. The speech is not a bit "aggressive"; quite the contrary, it's conciliatory—and significant.

(There is a touch of affectation in that comment on the war. It's true that my interest in the war has not quite petered out, and I suppose I shall go on having it up to the end. All the same, I had to force myself somewhat to write those lines.)

Here I stop. It has done me good, this little "talk" with you, and I shall resume it very soon. We shall never have known each other very well, Jenny, but your letter has been a great comfort and I've a feeling you are my only friend in all the world.

Antoine.

*Le Mousquier, 6/30/18.*

I am going to give you a surprise, my dear Jenny. Guess how I employed my afternoon yesterday! In looking through old papers, making up accounts, and writing business letters. For some days past I'd had it on my mind. A sort of itch to square up certain material problems and be able to tell myself I was leaving my house in order when the time came to leave it. Quite soon I'll be incapable of efforts of that kind. So it seemed best to take advantage of the fleeting interest I still can muster up in such matters.

Please forgive the businesslike tone of this letter. But, since all I possess will go to Paul, it's obviously up to me to let his mother know exactly how I stand financially.

I have not much to leave. Nothing, I expect, will remain of the investments my father left me. The alterations to my Paris house made a large inroad on them, and I was rash enough to transfer what remained into Russian bonds, which are most unlikely ever to recover. I count myself lucky to have saved from the wreck my home in the Rue de l'Université and the house at Maisons-Laffitte.

As for the former, it can be let or sold. In either case it should provide enough for you to live on in a simple way and give our little one a decent education. It won't mean luxury for him, and so much the better. But he will not suffer, either, from the soul-deadening constraints of poverty.

As for the Maisons house, I advise you to sell it after the war. It may tempt the fancy of some *nouveau riche*, and it deserves no better fate. I gathered from Daniel that your mother's house is heavily mortgaged. I have always had an impression that your mother and you, too, were greatly attached to it. It might be a good idea to devote the money raised by selling the Thibault house to paying off the mortgage. Thus your parents' country place would, in effect, belong to Paul. I will consult my lawyer as to the ways and means of arranging this.

As soon as I have a rough estimate of my estate, I will fix the amount of the little annuity I want to provide for Gise. I'm afraid, my poor Jenny, that all the bother of administering these funds will fall on you till your son comes of age. I think you will find Beynaud, my lawyer, a help; he is a worthy man, rather timid and a stickler for formalities, but trustworthy and, on the whole, a sound adviser.

Well, that is what I set out to write to you. It's a relief to have done with it. I shall not refer to the subject again until I am in a position to give you the final details. But for some days another plan has been hovering at the back of my mind, and it concerns you personally. The trouble is—it's of an extremely delicate order. I don't feel up to writing about it now, but one day I shall have to.

I have just spent a couple of hours under the olive trees, reading the papers. What is brewing, I wonder, behind the present lull in the activity of the German armies? Our stand between Montdidier and the Oise seems to have checked their advance. And the failure of the Austrians must have been a blow to their High Command. If the Central Powers fail to bring off some decisive victories in the course of the summer before the American army takes the field, a definite turn of the tide will follow, I imagine. But will I still be here to see it? The appalling slowness (from the individual's viewpoint) of the events that make history is something which has often been brought home to me during the last four years. And when a man has only a short time to live, he notices it even more.

However, I must admit that I seem just now to be in for a spell of better health. Is it the effect of the new injections? My choking fits are less painful and the bouts of fever less frequent. So much for my physical state. As for my "morale"—to employ the time-honoured expression used by the High Command to appraise the passivity of the troops sent to their death—it, too, has improved. You may have noticed it in the general tone of this letter. Its length, anyhow, shows the pleasure I have in these little "talks" with you. My only pleasure. But I must cut it short. I'm due now for a treatment.

Your friend,

A.

P.S. I submit to this treatment as conscientiously as ever. Queer, isn't it? There has been a curious change in the doctor's attitude toward me. Just now, for instance, though he certainly detects an improvement, he no longer dares to call my attention to it, and he spares me remarks beginning: "There you are! I told you so!" and so forth. But he comes to see me oftener, brings me newspapers and phonograph records, and does all sorts of little friendly services… . That is by way of answer to your question. This place suits me quite as well as any—for waiting for the end.

*Hospital No. 23, Royan, June 29, 1918.*

Dear Dr. Thibault,

I left French Guinea in the autumn of 1916, and your favour of May 30 has only just reached me here, where I am working as a nurse in the surgical ward. Yes, I remember sending off the parcel you speak of, but it was so long ago that I fear I cannot give you much in the way of information. I had very few dealings with the lady who asked me to post the parcel to you. She was brought to the hospital in a very bad way, with an attack of yellow fever that carried her off after a few days, though Dr. Lancelot did his best for her. It was in the spring of 1916, I think. I remember that she had been put on shore from a mail-steamer calling at Konakri. One night when I was on duty she gave me the article and your address; it was during one of the short spells when her mind was clear, for she was delirious most of the time. I am quite sure, though, that she did not ask me to write anything to you. She must have been travelling by herself when the boat called in, as no one came to see her during the two or three days she lay dying. I think she was buried in a pauper's grave in the European Cemetery. You might write to the house physician, Dr. Fabre; if he is still there, he could look up the register and give you the lady's name and date of decease. I am so sorry not to remember more; please excuse me.

Very truly yours,

Lucie Bonnet.

P.S. I have just remembered something and open my letter to tell you about it. I am almost sure it was that lady that had with her a big black bulldog she called Hurt or Hirsch or some such name. She asked for it each time she recovered consciousness, but we couldn't have it in the wards because it's against the rules and anyhow it was always biting people. One of the other nurses wanted to adopt it, but it gave her no end of trouble and in the end she had to have it shot.

## ANTOINE'S DIARY

*July 2, 1918*—Had a dream of Jacques just now, when I'd dozed off, in the small hours. Already it's gone blurred; impossible to piece it together again. But I know the scene was the little ground-floor apartment where Jacques and I lived together in the old days. One memory stands out especially: the day Jacques joined me there, after leaving the reformatory. It was I myself who arranged for him to come to me, so as to get him out of Father's clutches. But I couldn't repress a rather ugly, selfish feeling of annoyance at his coming. I remember quite well saying to myself: "He can live here, that's settled, but I won't have him interfering with my programme of work, messing up my career." My career! All my life long I've been obsessed by that idea; it was my watchword during fifteen strenuous years. Today, for Antoine Thibault lying in this bed, what irony is in that word "career"!

Yesterday I got the hospital clerk to buy me this notebook at the local stationer's. An invalid's whim, perhaps, keeping a diary under these conditions. Still, something to be said for it. Have noticed each time I wrote to Jenny the relief I found in writing down my thoughts, "getting it off my chest." Never kept a diary before; not even when I was sixteen and so many of my schoolmates—Fred, Gerbron, and the rest—were fervent diarists. A bit late to start! But this isn't to be a regular diary; I shall merely jot down, when I feel like it, the ideas simmering in my brain. Sound, from a medical point of view, undoubtedly. Every thought tends to grow into an obsession in the brain of an invalid or of a man suffering from insomnia. Writing it purges it away. Also it's a diversion, helps to kill time. (To think that I, who always used to find the available time too short for all I had to do, should talk now of "killing" it! Even at the front, even last winter in the hospital, I lived at high pressure, oblivious of the lapse of time. It's only since my days are numbered that the hours have grown interminable.)

A fairish night. Temp, this morning: 99.8.

*Evening*—The fits of oppression have come back. Temp.: 101.8. Intercostal pains. Pleural complications setting in?

Let's lay my "ghosts," by getting them down on paper.

Haunted all day by this business of making my will. Must organize my death. (Curious, this mania I still have for planning! But this time it's not on my own behalf; it's for them, for little Paul.) Must have worked through the figures ten or a dozen times: sale of the Maisons property, lease of my house in the Rue de l'Université, sale of my laboratory equipment. Might be possible to get a chemical manufacturer to take the place on a long lease. Studler could scout round for one. Otherwise must have the apparatus taken down and sold.

Studler—mustn't forget him; after the war he'll be out of a job, practically penniless, poor fellow. Will leave instructions for him and Jousselin, explaining how to deal with the case-histories and records of experiments. (Present them to the library of the medical school?)

*July 3*—Lucas has shown me the results of the blood-test. Thoroughly bad. Even Bardot could not help admitting, in that drawling voice of his: "Not too good." My fine healthy blood of former years! When recovering from my first wound, how confident I felt in my physical fitness; how proud of the quality of my blood when I saw how quickly the wound was healing! … Jacques, too. Our Thibault blood.

Put it straight to Bardot about the pleural complications. "An abscess—that would be the last straw, eh?" He shrugged derisively, but gave me a thorough looking over. Nothing to fear on that score was his verdict.

Thibault blood! Paul has it; my healthy blood of early days, our birthright, is flowing still—in the little fellow's veins.

During the war, never once did I acquiesce in dying, never even for ten seconds did I mentally give up my life. And now, too, I refuse to relinquish it. Of course I can't hoodwink myself any longer; I have to recognize and face the irremediable; but I won't agree to it, I won't play the meek, consenting victim.

*Afternoon*—I know well what reason, not to say my sense of dignity, would urge: somehow to regain my faculty of looking on the outside world and its incessant flux objectively. Not through the distorting medium of my personality, across the shadow of death. To remind myself that I am but a tiny fragment of the universal Whole. And damaged goods at that! What matter? What is this tiny "I" in comparison with the rest, that will continue after me!

Tiny, yes; but how all-important I used to think it!

Still—it's worth trying.

A golden rule: Never let yourself be hypnotized by the *individual*.

*July 4*—A nice letter from Jenny this morning. Charming details about her son. (Couldn't help reading bits to Goiran, who is crazy about his two kids.) Must get Jenny to have him photographed.

Another thing I must do, that's write to her the Letter (with a capital L!). A difficult job. Better wait till I've had a good night's rest before tackling it.

What a miracle it is—there's no other word for it—the coming of this child at the precise moment when the two families from which he springs were on the point of dying out without having given anything worthwhile to the world! I wonder what elements of his heredity on the maternal side he has in

him. The best, I hope. But one thing I know for certain, even at this stage: he is truly of *our* blood. Strong-willed, intelligent, uncompromising. Jacques's son. A Thibault! Have ruminated all day on that theme. That seemingly haphazard uprush of the sap which at a given point has produced a new branch on the old Thibault trunk. Is it mere nonsense to surmise that something lies behind it, that it corresponds to some creative plan? Family pride, perhaps. Still, why shouldn't this child be the one predestined from all time, that fine flower of the Thibault species which our family has been trying to produce, generation after generation? The masterpiece which nature owed it to herself to achieve, sooner or later, and of which my father, my brother, and myself were mere rough drafts? And why should the dynamism, the latent energy, that was in us before him, not find an outlet this time in a genuinely creative impulse?

*Midnight*—Insomnia. Phantoms to be "exorcized."

For a month and a half, seven grim weeks, I've known I was a hopeless case. How familiar those words I have just written, "a hopeless case," and everyone fancies he understands them! But nobody except a man condemned to death knows what they really mean. And that knowledge comes in a flash of revelation, driving all before it, leaving one dazed, an empty shell.

Yet as a doctor, living in constant touch with death, I should have known. With death? With others' deaths! Have often tried to trace the causes of that physical impossibility of envisaging my own death. Due, perhaps, to some special quality of my life-instinct (a thought that comes to me tonight for the first time).

That vitality I used to have, the zest I brought to everything I did, keeping the ball of action rolling, so to speak, I attribute largely to the craving I had to perpetuate myself by creative acts; to "survive." An instinctive dread of disappearing. (Fairly common, that, no doubt. But in very different degrees.) In my case a hereditary trait. Have been thinking a lot about Father. He was haunted by a desire to attach his name to all sorts of things: his charitable societies, prizes for moral excellence, that huge institution of his at Crouy. A desire he realized by having his name blazoned on the facade of the reformatory—THE OSCAR THIBAULT FOUNDATION. Significant, too, was his wish to impose his Christian name (the only strictly personal part of his designation), hyphenated, on his descendants; and that mania he had for flaunting his initials everywhere, on his crockery, on the garden-gate, even on the backs of his leather chairs. There was much more to it than the proprietary instinct (or, as I used to think, mere ostentation). It was something finer—a craving to leave some trace behind him, not to be utterly blotted out by death. (Evidently the Christian after-life he looked for was not enough.) And I've inherited that craving from him. I, too, have a secret hope of associating my name with something that will outlast me; a discovery, for instance.

The moral: no man can escape his father!

Seven weeks, fifty days and fifty nights, facing a certainty, without a fleeting doubt or glimmer of illusion. And yet (this is what I want to put on record), curiously enough, I find that there are respites from obsession; brief spells, not of forgetting, but when the fixed idea retreats. It sometimes happens—oftener as the days go by—that I have periods of from two or three to (at most) fifteen or twenty minutes during which the certainty of dying before the year is out ceases to hold the foreground and sinks into relative quiescence. During these periods I suddenly find myself capable of doing things, of reading attentively, of writing, listening, joining in discussions—in a word, of taking an interest in matters not concerned with my health, much as if I had shaken off my obsession. Yet it is never absent, I am always conscious of it lurking on the threshold, biding its time. Even in my sleep I somehow feel that it's there, in ambush.

*July 6*—Have felt better ever since Thursday. The moment I suffer less, the world seems an almost cheerful place. Reading in the morning papers an account of the Italian successes in the Piave valley, I had a sensation that I'd quite forgotten—a little thrill of pleasure. A hopeful sign.

Wrote nothing yesterday. Discovered, when I was out of doors, that I'd left my diary in my room. Too lazy to go upstairs for it, but all afternoon I hankered after it. So it's beginning to grow on me, this diary-keeping itch!

Not much time for "diarizing" today, however. Too many clinical observations to write up in the black notebook. Since buying the diary I seem to have gone rather slack about my case-history. Too scrappy, the notes I've been writing in it lately. Still, it's the case-history that really matters, and it must come first. Must make a clean-cut separation: the diary for my "ghosts," the notebook for everything relating to my health—temperatures, treatments, effects of remedies, secondary reactions, progress of toxaemia, discussions with Bardot and Mazet, *etc.* Without wanting to set too high a value on them, I firmly believe that these daily notes, recorded from the start by a gas victim who is also a doctor, will comprise a set of clinical observations that in the present state of medical knowledge may be of very great service. Especially if I go on with it *up to the end*. Bardot has promised to see that it is published in the *Medical Review*.

Yesterday fat Delahaye left. On convalescent leave. Thinks he's definitely cured. (And may be, for all I know.) He came upstairs to say good-bye. Pretended to be in the devil of a hurry; obviously ill at ease. Didn't say: "See you again one of these days," or anything like that. Which Joseph, who was tidying the room, must have noticed, for he turned to me the moment the door closed behind D., and said: "There, sir, you see some people get over it!"

Just now I almost wrote: "If I am still alive, it's for the sake of my case-history." I should clear up the question of *suicide*. And admit, belatedly, that the case-history has never been anything but a pretext. The way one throws dust in one's own eyes! Curious, how I hate admitting to myself that I've never really wanted to end my life. No, not even in my blackest hours. If I'd really meant to make the plunge, I'd have done so in Paris the morning when I bought the ampules. It crossed my mind again just before I took the train; and it was that morning that I began bamboozling myself with this idea of a case-history. Pretending I had a last duty to perform before the end, a "major work" to complete. As if the importance I set on these clinical notes could have possibly outweighed, frustrated, the temptation! Cowardice? No, I swear it wasn't that. Had the temptation been a real one, fear would not have restrained me. What was lacking was not courage, but the desire. The truth is that I merely dallied with the idea of suicide, and had no trouble in brushing it aside when I'd had enough of it. Only too glad of the excuse of the case-history to keep up—and calling it "strength of mind"!

And yet—unless I die suddenly, and there's no likelihood of that, worse luck!—I know I shall not wait for a natural end. (No make-believe about that, I'm positive!) Yes, the time to act will come, that's certain; I've only to let it come. I have the stuff ready; nothing could be easier. A consoling thought, when all is said and done.

*Later*—When we were on the veranda before lunch, Goiran brought a Swiss paper giving a full report of Wilson's latest speech. He read it out aloud—one could tell that he was deeply moved, as, indeed, we all were. Each of Wilson's messages is like a gust of fresh, pure air sweeping over Europe. Makes one think of the oxygen they pump in after an explosion in a coal-mine so that the poor devils buried in the pit can stave off suffocation, till rescue comes.

*July 7, 5 a.m.*—The fixed idea. Like a brick wall against which I run my head perpetually. I rise to my feet, charge at it once more, stagger—and start again. Sometimes (but without believing it for a moment) I try to persuade myself that it isn't true, that I've still the ghost of a chance. Only to give myself a pretext for mustering afresh the host of arguments which always, inevitably, launch me once more at the brick wall.

*Afternoon, out of doors*—Read Wilson's message again. Much more explicit than previous ones. It defines his ideas as to the terms of peace, lays down the conditions which are essential if the settlement is to be "definitive." A nobly inspiring programme: (i) the suppression of all political systems likely to bring about new wars; (2) before any change of frontier or annexation, the opinion of the population involved to be taken; (3) *all* nations to subscribe to a code of international law and to bind themselves to abide by its terms; (4) the establishment of an international committee acting as a court of arbitration, on which all the nations of the civilized world, without discrimination, shall be represented.

(I enjoyed writing the above, setting it down in black and white! Had the impression of endorsing it, lending a hand… . Childish, perhaps, but how satisfying!)

Everyone here is talking about Wilson's peace plans. Gleams of hope on every face. And how thrilling to think that in all the cities of Europe and America people are feeling the same way! And to picture the excitement over that message in every dugout on the front lines, in every rest-camp! All of

them on both sides so sick of slaughtering each other for four dreary years. (Four years? They've been at it for centuries, egged on by their rulers.) The world was waiting for that appeal to reason. Will the powers that be pay heed to it? Let's hope that this time the good seed will strike root in every land. What Wilson's aiming at is so clear, so sensible, so well in keeping with man's truest instincts, with the trend of human progress. Of course all sorts of difficulties will crop up when it comes to carrying out his plan; it may mean years of uphill going. But how can one doubt that this is the one and only path that must be followed, hard though it be, by the world of tomorrow? Four years of warfare have brought nothing but wholesale slaughter, disaster everywhere. Surely the most fervent addicts of the "fruits of victory" are forced to own today that modern war—however you look at it, from a national or an individual viewpoint—spells unmitigated ruin, without any hope of compensating gain. That being so, once the futility of war, on every count, has been proved by experience, and once we find that the conclusions of political and economic experts bear out the instinctive belief the masses have in pacifism, what earthly obstacle can there be to the organization of perpetual peace?

After lunch, a choking fit. Had an injection. Then lay down on a beach-chair under the olives. Too fagged to write the letter to Jenny, though I'm very anxious to get it off my mind.

Listened to a discussion between Goiran, Bardot, and Mazet—about Wilson's governing idea, a committee of international arbitration. No one stands to lose by it; rather, every nation stands to gain. Another point which is not stressed as it should be is that the procedure of this Supreme Court would humour the national susceptibilities and self-esteem which have given rise to so many wars. However apt to take offence over questions of prestige a nation, a government, or even a monarch may be, each would feel less humiliated at having to bow to the verdict of an International Court that bases its decisions on the collective interests of all nations than at having to yield to a neighbour's threats or the pressure of a hostile coalition. Goiran observed that this tribunal should be constituted the moment hostilities cease and *before* the loser nation is called to account. Thus it would be possible to discuss the peace terms not in an acrimonious spirit, as between enemies, but calmly, under the auspices of a league of all nations, which would take a broad view of the controversy, deal impartially with questions of war guilt, and pronounce an equitable judgment.

*A League of Nations*—The only certain way of making future wars impossible. For no sooner would a nation be attacked or threatened by another than automatically all the other nations would join in against the aggressor, paralyse his activities, and force him to submit his claim or grievances to arbitration. And, taking a still longer view, one may expect the League of Nations to revise the economic systems of the world on international lines and organize a planned cooperation of all peoples, truly world-wide at last. And thus human progress would enter on a new, decisive phase.

Goiran made a lot of very sensible remarks on the subject. I used to take rather too harsh a view of Goiran; the truth is that his air of knowing everything used to get on my nerves. He never lets one forget his academic qualifications. Even his tone of voice is that of the history professor he is in civil life lecturing his pupils. But it's a fact, he really does know a great many things. And follows the march of events with a discerning eye. He reads eight or ten dailies and gets a bundle of Swiss newspapers and magazines regularly each week. A well-balanced mind, in short, and I've always had a weakness for such mentalities. The effort he makes to take a long view of this war and judge it from the historian's angle is most refreshing. Voisenet, too, was present. (Bardot once said to me: "Goiran and Voisenet are the only men here who have their vocal cords almost intact—and they never let you forget it!")

Not too bad a day. Should say this relative well-being is due quite as much to Wilson as to the injection.

A postscript to the above remarks. The institution of a League of Nations might well cause something absolutely new to spring from the ruins this war will leave behind: a world conscience. By grace of which humanity may make a decisive stride toward an era of liberty and justice.

*11 p.m.*—Skimmed the newspapers. Hollow verbiage, disgusting pettiness. Really, Wilson seems the only statesman capable today of taking a broad view. The democratic ideal at its noblest. Beside him our French and British demagogues strike one as the merest pettifoggers. All of them are carrying on, more or less, the same imperialist traditions which they affect to damn in the enemy countries.

Talked to Voisenet and Goiran about America. Voisenet lived in New York for a few years. He made us understand the stability and security of the United States. Goiran in great form. Waxing prophetic, he predicted that in the twenty-first century Europe would be invaded by the yellow races; the future of the whites would be restricted to the American continent.

*2 a.m.*—Insomnia. Dozed off for a few minutes, during which I dreamt of Studler. In the back lab in Paris. The Caliph had a surgeon's coat on, plus a forage-cap; his beard was cut shorter. I'd been enthusiastically holding forth to him about something: Wilson, probably, and the League. He looked round at me over his shoulder, with his big, moony eyes. "How the hell does that concern you, Thibault? You'll be dead by then."

Still thinking about Wilson (the Caliph notwithstanding!). Wilson strikes me as the right man for the task before him. If the end of this war is to be the end of War, the coming peace must be the work of a "new" man, an "outsider," who bears no grudges; someone who has not, like our European statesmen, lived four years in the thick of it with one idea in mind—to crush the enemy. Wilson, the man from overseas. Representative of a land that stands for brotherhood in peace and freedom. And he has behind him a quarter of the population of the world. Obviously every sensible American must be saying to himself these days: "If we have managed to build up and to preserve a stable and constructive peace between our States a century through, what's impossible in a United States of Europe?" Wilson is of the lineage of men like Washington. (Of which he's aware. Allusions to it in his speech.) Washington hated war, but waged it to free his country from war. Always with the thought at the back of his mind (Goiran said this) that by the same token he would bring freedom to the world; that if he succeeded in combining all those small hostile States into a vast, pacific Federation, the Old World would be drawn irresistibly to follow his lead. (But it's taken us more than a century to grasp this obvious truth!)

As I write, the clock-hands turn their sleepless round. Wilson's helping me to keep my "ghosts" at bay!

Exciting problems, even for a man under sentence of death. For the first time since coming back from Paris I'm able to take an interest in the future. The future of the world which, when the war ends, will be cast into the melting-pot. All will be jeopardized—and for heaven knows how long!—if the peace that's coming doesn't remould, reconstruct, and, above all, unify, this stricken Europe of ours. Yes, if armed force is to go on being the principal instrument of policy as between nations, if each nation is to go on regarding itself as sole judge of its conduct and free to indulge its appetites for "expansion" as and when it chooses, if the Federation of European States does not bring about an economic peace, as Wilson desires, with world-wide free trade, the suppression of customs barriers, and so forth—in short, if the age of international anarchy isn't cut violently short and the nations don't compel their governments to submit at last to a regime of justice equal for all and consented to by all, this war will have served no purpose, all the blood that has been shed will have been shed in vain.

But just now—there is no limit to one's hopes. … (I write of this "better world" that's coming, as if I were going to be here to see it!)

*July 8*—Thirty-seven today. My last birthday.

Waiting for the lunch bell to ring. The washerwoman and her daughter have just walked by under the veranda, their bundles on their shoulders. Felt a queer emotion the other day watching the younger woman pass, and noting how she walked, with a slight effort and a certain stiffness at the hips. Recognized the signs. Pregnant. Hardly perceptible yet; only a vague fullness at the waist. Three and a half months, four at most. A poignant emotion in which mingled awe and pity, jealousy and something of despair. For one who has none, what mystery in that future, made visible to my eyes, almost tangible! In that being still in limbo, with a whole uncharted life before him! That birth which my death will not prevent!

*Out of doors*—Wilson still in everybody's mind. For once the bridgers have knocked off—even the company sergeant-major's "club"; they've been palavering for the last two months, their cards untouched.

The papers, too, full of comments. This morning Bardot pointed out how significant it was that the censorship was allowing people to foster these dreams of peace. A fine article in a Swiss paper. The writer recalls Wilson's message of January 1917. "Peace without victory," and the progressive reduction of armaments, ending in general disarmament. (January 1917. Recalls to me that village where we camped, behind Hill 304. The vaulted roof of the cellar where we messed. Discussions about disarmament with Payen and poor Seiffert.)

Mazet came just now to tell about the test. Diminution of the chlorates, and especially the phosphates.

Exhausting weather, thunder in the air. Dragged myself to the Persian wheel to listen to the rippling water. I find it harder and harder to read coherently, to fix my attention on someone else's thoughts. On my own, still possible. This diary is a great standby. Which won't last indefinitely. Must make the most of it, meanwhile.

That 1917 speech of Wilson's. Disarmament. The supreme thing to aim at. At lunch all agreed on this, except Reymond. Today one hears people coming out with things no one'd have dared to say, even to think, only two years ago. E.g.: An army is a cancer feeding on the nation's vitals. (A striking metaphor, for popular consumption; that way every workman employed in munition factories is written down a parasite living at the public expense.) A nation the third of whose budget is swallowed up by military expenditures is heading inescapably for bankruptcy or war. The present cataclysm is the necessary consequence of forty years' systematic armament. Without general disarmament no lasting peace is feasible. A truism that's been enunciated time after time. In vain, for an obvious reason. It is idle to hope that governments convinced that might prevails over right, deeply committed to an armament race, and, what's more, always ready to fly at each other's throat—it's folly to hope such governments will ever agree among themselves to reverse steam and simultaneously return to sanity. But all that may change in a twinkling, when peace is declared. For every European nation will have gone back to zero. A clean sweep. Arsenals depleted, finances ruined by the war. A fresh start will have to be made, on a wholly new basis. Yes, an unprecedented, glorious new day is breaking, the dawning possibility of world-wide disarmament. And Wilson's grasped that. That idea of disarmament he has broadcast to the world cannot but be welcomed enthusiastically by public opinion everywhere. These four years have paved the way, fortified men's instinctive hatred of war, whetted their desire to see an international moral code inaugurated that will at last replace the duel of opposing armies in deciding conflicts between nations.

What is needed now is for the vast majority of peace-loving men to compel the tiny minority whose interest it is to foment wars to bow to the will of a strong organization, capable of imposing peace and order on the world—a League of Nations having at its disposal an international police force, if needed, and endowed with such authority as to rule out definitely any recourse to arms. Only let the various governments refer the matter to a plebiscite—there can be no doubt as to the result.

It goes without saying that today at lunch Major Reymond was the only one of us to wax indignant and call Wilson a "visionary fanatic" completely ignorant of the realities of the European situation. The line, in fact, that Rumelles took at Maxim's. Goiran stood up to him. "If the peace that's coming isn't a genuine reconciliation, and if those who make it aren't actuated by an ideal of justice and the desire for a united Europe—well, that peace which millions of poor devils have paid for with their lives will be no more than a snare and a delusion, another arbitrary treaty that the losers, thirsting for revenge, will tear up at the earliest opportunity." Reymond retorted: "It's common knowledge what those 'Holy Alliances' amount to, and how long they last." Rashly I chipped in, drawing on myself this retort (not so silly, perhaps, on second thought, and less paradoxical than it sounds): "Obviously, Thibault, a confirmed realist like you was bound to fall for the charms of such Utopian fancies." (Worth thinking over that remark.)

Some drops of rain. Let's only hope the storm will give us a cool night.

*July 3, dawn*—A bad night. Choking fits. Not two hours' sleep, all told, and in tiny scraps.

Thought of Rachel. In these sultry nights the perfume of the necklace is overpowering. She, too, had a stupid end, in a hospital bed. Alone. But one's always alone, dying.

Just had this thought: that this morning at this very hour somewhere in the trenches thousands of wretched men are awaiting the order to attack. Tried, cynically, to extract a grain of comfort from it. In vain. I'm more jealous of them for being fit enough to take their chance than able to sympathize with them for having to go over the top.

In the book of Kipling's I am trying to read I lit on the epithet "juvenile." Made me think of Jacques. It fits him so well. He never really grew up. (See medical handbooks for characteristics of adolescence. He had them all: enthusiasm, a way of rushing to extremes, pure-mindedness, temerity combined with shyness, a taste for abstract ideas, a loathing for half-measures, and the charm that comes of an incapacity for scepticism.) Had he lived to maturity, would he ever have been anything but a grownup boy?

Just read again what I wrote last night—Reymond's remark about "utopian fancies." No, I've always fought shy—unnecessarily so, perhaps—of the lures of the imagination. Have always held by the maxim (I forget where I read it): "The worst mental derangement is the habit of believing what one *wishes* to be true." No, decidedly no! When Wilson declares that what he wants is a world made pure of heart, my scepticism is up in arms. But when he goes on to talk of a world made safe for all peace-loving nations, I'm with him every time! I haven't enough illusions as to the perfectibility of human nature to believe that any man-made world can ever become "pure of heart." But there is nothing Utopian about a world made safe for peace. Organized society has succeeded in getting private persons to submit their differences to courts instead of taking the law into their own hands. Why should not governments be prevented from launching nations at each other's throat when some difference crops up between them? War is "natural" to man, they say. So is disease. Human progress has been one long struggle against pernicious "natural" forces. The leading European nations have managed gradually to achieve their national unity. Why should not that process be carried a stage further and the Continent achieve a similar unity? Another forward step, another victory of the social instinct. "What about the patriotic instinct?" the major would ask. But it isn't the natural instinct we call patriotism that causes war; it is an acquired, artificial emotion, "nationalist" passion. Affection for one's native soil, a patois, regional traditions, does not involve any violent hostility toward one's neighbours (e.g., Picardy and Provence, Brittany and Savoy). In a European confederation the patriotic instinct would be no more than affection for one's "local habitation." "Utopian"—that is obviously the term with which they all will decry Wilson's programme. Irritating to see that even the newspapers most favourable to it talk of him as a "great visionary," "the evangelist of a new age," and so forth. They're wide of the mark, to my mind; on the contrary, what strikes me is his common sense. His ideas are simple, at once new and very old, a logical conclusion of all the theories and experiments of former ages. Tomorrow Europe will stand at the crossroads, faced by two alternatives: either reorganization on federal lines or a return to the old system of periodic wars—until all nations are utterly worn out. Supposing that for some fantastic reason Europe rejects the opportunity of concluding the eminently reasonable peace proposed by Wilson—the only lasting peace, based on complete disarmament—she will soon discover (and at what a cost!) that she is once more up against the old insoluble problems and plunged again into the shambles. Happily there's little likelihood of that.

*Evening*—A trying day. Black despair again. Impression of having fallen down an open manhole. I didn't deserve this. I deserved (pride?) the "fine career" my teachers and friends predicted for me. Then suddenly, at the corner of that trench, the whiff of gas! The death-trap set by fate.

*3 a.m.*—Too short of breath to sleep. Can breathe only in the sitting position, propped up on three pillows. Have turned on my light to take my drops; and to write this:

I have never had the time or the (romantic) inclination to keep a diary. I regret it. If I could hold between my hands today, in black and white, all my past life since my fifteenth year, I'd have a better impression of having lived. My life would have specific bulk and form—historical concreteness. It wouldn't be the shapeless, shadowy thing it is, vague as a half-remembered dream. (In the same way the course of an illness is recorded, and takes concrete form, on the temperature chart.)

I started this diary with the aim of laying my "ghosts." I believed that was my motive. But there were a lot of less avowed reasons, too, behind it; it was a pastime and a form of self-indulgence—an attempt to salvage some fragment of the life and personality, now on the point of foundering, of which I was so proud. To "salvage"—for whom, to what end? It's absurd, really, for I know I shall not have time or respite to read again what I have written. For whom is this diary, then? *For the child*, obviously. For Paul… . This flashed on me a moment ago, through the haze of insomnia.

A fine little fellow, robust, promising grandly-—with all the future, mine, the world's, implicit in him. Since my first sight of him he has never left my thoughts, and the idea that *I* can't be in *his* worries me preposterously. No, he will never have known me or anything about me; I leave next to nothing: a few photographs, a little money, and just a name, "Uncle Antoine." Nothing. That thought's unbearable at times. If during these months of reprieve I had perseverance enough to write daily in this diary—why not? Perhaps one day, little Paul, you will feel moved to dip into these pages and try to find a

trace of me, a vestige, the last footprints of a man who is departing from the scene. And thus "Uncle Antoine" will come to mean to you something more than a name, a photo in an album. I know well that this self-portrait can hardly have much likeness; how changed from the man I used to be is the bedridden invalid I am today! Still, it will be better than nothing, perhaps; I cling to this hope.

Too tired. Feverish. The night orderly saw my light. Had him give me an extra pillow. Those drops have ceased to have any effect. Must tell Bardot to try something else.

A bluish glimmer on my windowpane. Moonlight still? Or daybreak already? How often, after dozing off for some period I could not determine, have I switched on the light, only to see the clock-face leer at me, 11:10 … 11:20 … or some such ghastly hour!

Four-thirty-five now. Not the moon, then. The pale light heralding the dawn. At last!

*July 11*—The bitter, exasperating languor of these days of vague suffering in this bed! Just finished lunch. Never-ending, these meals served on a small bed-table, the spells of waiting that exhaust one's patience and kill what little appetite one may have had. Every ten minutes, enter Joseph carrying a tray with a diminutive "course" on it—in a saucer! Follows from noon to three a lull, three empty hours, when the afternoon borrows its silence from the night. A calm broken only by coughs in neighbouring rooms; and at each cough I find myself naming the cougher, as one does for a familiar voice. Three o'clock brings the thermometer; then Joseph, noises in the passage, chatter in the garden … Life.

*July 12*—Two dismal days. X-rayed yesterday. The knots of bronchial ganglions have increased again. As I suspected.

Von Kiihlmann, who made that admirably moderate speech in the Reichstag the other day, has had to vacate his seat. A discouraging symptom of the spirit prevailing in Germany. On the other hand, the news of an Italian advance in the Piave valley is confirmed.

*Night*—Stayed in bed. Still, a less trying day than I'd anticipated. Managed to talk to some visitors: Darros and Goiran. Long consultation this morning: at Bardot's request, Sègre was present. No particularly alarming change for the worse detected by them. Everyone I come in contact with is full of hope. And, though I warn myself against taking wishes for realities, I can't help yielding to this wave of optimism. Obviously we are gaining ground. At Villers-Cotterets, Long-pont, *etc.* The Fourth Army. (If good old Thérivier is still with it, he must have his hands full these days!) Obviously, too, the Austrians have had a crushing defeat. And there's the new eastern front, with Japan. But Goiran, who is often well informed, asserts that the recent bombardments of Paris have badly shaken our morale; even at the front the men are horrified at the thought that their families are exposed to the same perils as themselves. He gets a lot of letters. "We've had enough of it." "Stop the war, no matter on what terms." And perhaps it *will* end soon, thanks to the Americans. I see one good thing in that: if our governments let America finish off the war, they'll be obliged to let her fix up the peace—an American peace; Wilson's, not the one our generals are out for.

If this improvement persists tomorrow, I shall at last write the letter to Jenny.

*July 16*—In great pain these last few days. No energy, no interest in anything. Diary within arm's reach, but no desire to open it. Could hardly bring myself to make the usual entries in my case-history each evening. Seemingly better this morning. Longer intervals between choking fits, shorter attacks, cough less violent and racking. Wonder if the arsenic treatment I started again on Sunday accounts for it. Have I staved off a relapse once again?

Poor Chemery's more to be pitied than I. Septicaemia setting in; gangrenous bronchopneumonia with diffused inflammation. Done for.

And Duplay, suppurating phlebitis of the right leg. And Bert and Cauvin… .

What ugly things lurk in one's mental underworld! All those unsuspected tendencies that the war, for instance, has led me to detect within myself. Even possibilities of hatred and violence, not to say cruelty. Contempt for weaklings. And … fear! Yes, war has brought to light in me the foulest instincts, the worst side of human nature, and I'd be able now to understand all the lapses, even the crimes of others—now that I have found the germs of these things in myself.

*Wednesday, July 17, night*—Undoubted improvement. How long will it last? Seized this opportunity for writing *the letter*. This afternoon. Several drafts. Difficult to strike the right note. Had thought at first of leading up to it gradually. Finally decided on direct methods: a single letter, complete, explaining everything. Direct methods, if she is the woman I think she is, are certainly best. Great hopes of persuading her. Tried to present the project as a mere formality, indispensable for the child's welfare.

Too late to catch the evening mail. So I have till tomorrow morning to rewrite my letter and decide whether to post it.

Germans attacking on the Champagne front. Rochas must be in the thick of it. Is this the first move of their famous plan: to push through to the Marne, make a drive at Saint-Mihiel, surround Verdun, and swing round westward in the direction of the Seine? They're making progress already north and south of the Marne. Dormans is threatened. (A picture in my mind of the little town: the bridge, the church square, an ambulance drawn up outside the porch.) How far away the end seems yet! No chance of my seeing even the first signs of it. At the best possible going, 1919 will be the year of the American debut, their prentice year; 1920, a year of big, decisive battles; 1921, capitulation of the Central Powers, Wilson's peace, demobilization.

Read my letter again for the last time. Tone satisfactory; no possibility of misunderstanding; my arguments put at their strongest. Surely she cannot fail to understand; can't say "No."

*July 18, morning*—Just had a glimpse of Sègre in his shorts! No longer in the least like M. Thiers!

*Afternoon, in the garden*—More to record about this morning's glimpse. I'd risen earlier than usual so as to get my letter off with the housekeeper's car. As I was letting down my blind, I noticed one of the windows in No. 2 Building a little open and had that memorable sight of Sègre, our eminent Prof. Sègre, at his toilet. Bare from the waist up, the tight-fitting shorts cruelly revealing loins scraggy as an old dromedary's, one wisp of hair plastered on his bald cranium, he was cleaning his teeth with finical intentness. Am so used to seeing him under his "M. Thiers" aspect—as he lets us see him, stiff and starched and solemn, eking out every inch of his short stature, his chin jutting forward and a handsome wig perched on his head—that at first I didn't recognize him. I watched him spit some soapy water into the basin; then, bringing his face close to the mirror, he stuck his fingers into his mouth, fished out his false teeth, and, after scanning them with an anxious air, proceeded to sniff them (it reminded me of an animal on the scent!). At that moment I stepped back hastily from my window; I felt not only embarrassed, but emotionally affected in a very odd way. Yes, I experienced suddenly a fellow-feeling almost amounting to affection for the pompous old martinet.

It's not my first experience of that kind. I had been seized by the same feeling for others, if not for Sègre. For months now I have been living in daily contact, rubbing shoulders with this group of people: doctors, orderlies, and patients. I have come to know their figures, gestures, mannerisms, so well that I can promptly and positively identify, at quite a distance, the shoulders protruding over the back of an armchair, a hand emptying an ashtray out of a window, the voices I overhear behind the kitchen-garden wall. But, though I cannot be accused of being "stand-offish," there's always a barrier of reserve that keeps me from real intimacy. Even when I was like other men, sociable, without a care in the world, I always felt cut off from them by that barrier; a stranger among strangers. How is it that this sense of isolation can suddenly break down and give place to a rush of something like affection when I catch one of them unawares, at a moment when he is alone? Time and again a fleeting glimpse—in a mirror or through a door left ajar—of one of my fellow-patients engaged in one of those humble acts that a man performs only when he feels sure of being unobserved (poring over a photo he has stealthily drawn from his pocket, crossing himself before getting into bed, or, more trivial still, smiling to himself over some secret thought with a vaguely sheepish air) has been enough for me to discover instantaneously in him a comrade, a being like myself whom for a spellbound moment I long to make my friend.

And yet I haven't the least knack of making friends. I have no friend. Have never had one. How I envied Jacques his gift for friendship!

Once more writing is a pleasure. A marked improvement in my health these last few days.

*Evening*—At lunch today, war memories. (When peace comes, war stories will usurp the place of hunting-yarns.) Darros told us about a patrol in Alsace at the start of the war. One night he was walking through an evacuated village with a few men. The moon was shining; nobody about. Suddenly he spotted three German soldiers lying sound asleep on the sidewalk, their rifles beside them. "Close up like that," he said, "we somehow couldn't think of them as Boches; they were just poor dog-tired fellows like ourselves. I hesitated a bit, then decided to pretend not to notice them. And the eight men behind me did the same thing. We walked past the sleeping Germans without turning our heads. And never after that did any of us make the least allusion to what we'd done that night by a sort of tacit agreement."

*July 20*—An "inspection" of the hospital yesterday. On the visiting "commission" were all the big bugs of the neighbourhood. For two days Sègre, Bardot, and Mazet had worked like demons, getting things in trim. It revived horrid memories of barrack life in the early days; in the back areas war has brought no change.

Lots might be said about "discipline"—the "making of an army," as they say. I wonder! Regular army doctors like Brun are definitely inferior to civilian medical officers. Why? Because they've had a sense of army hierarchy drilled into them for years. And this habit of obedience seems to limit the freedom of their diagnoses, their sense of responsibility, to the number of stripes on their sleeves!

Military discipline. I remember Paoli, the orderly at the Compiègne infirmary. A holy terror! Bloodshot eyes, the face of a pimp. Still, human under the surface, quite likely; every evening he would trot off to the river-bank to get hempseed for his pet starling. He was a "re-enlisted sergeant," one of that detested and detestable class of veterans known to the men as "old sweats." Why did he re-enlist? Probably because he had discovered that soldiering gave him unique opportunities for bullying and terrorizing. The medical officers had detailed him to register the names of the young soldiers reporting sick at the infirmary. From my office I could hear them knocking at his door. He always put the same question: "Now, then, out with it! Playing sick, ain't you, you lousy little swine?" I could picture the youngster tongue-tied, staring in terror at the sergeant. "Nothing to say, my lad? In that case—clear out!" And without more ado, the wretched youth about-faced and decamped. But the medical officer thought very highly of Paoli. "Thanks to him," he told me, "I'm not bothered with shirkers and malingerers."

Father used to say that the army is a nation's training school, and always hounded his Crouy lads to the recruiting-offices.

*Sunday, July 21*—This week's tests show steady loss of phosphorus and mineral salts in spite of all our efforts.

War news good. An advance south of the Ourcq; another toward Château-Thierry. Movement extending from the Aisne to the Marne. Have always heard that Foch was biding his time for switching from the defensive to the offensive. Has that time come?

The major spends his days moving his flags forward on the map. Heated discussions about Malvy's "treachery" and the High Court judgment. Politics comes into its own again the moment things go better at the front.

*July 22, night*—Kérazel had a visit today from his brother-in-law, deputy from the Nievre. He lunched with us. Belongs to the Radical-Socialist Party, I gathered. Only a different label, anyhow; all parties have fallen into line as regards the war, and repeat the same dreary platitudes. Intensely boring conversation. One point, however; referring to the Austrian peace proposals transmitted to the French government by Sixte de Bourbon in the spring of last year, Goiran waxed indignant at our turning them down. Seems that old Ribot was the most intransigent, and he worked Poincaré and Lloyd George round to his view. One of the reasons put forward in French political circles was, it seems, that there could be no question of considering peace proposals transmitted to the Republic by a member of the House of Bourbon. It would be giving the royalists a trump card for their propaganda, and that would never do! The regime might even be imperilled. Especially now, with all the power in the hands of the military clique… . Unbelievable!

*July 23*—That deputy yesterday—a fine specimen of modern restlessness. Came by the night express from Paris to save a day. Kept glancing at his watch. A bundle of nerves. Gave the impression of being slightly tipsy; his hand shook as he poured out his wine. One felt his brain wobbling, too, when he tried to handle ideas.

He takes travel for activity, and his aimless activity for work. And grandiloquence for logic. And a blustering tone for a sign of competence. In conversation he takes anecdotal details for general ideas; in politics, a lack of vision for a proof of sturdy realism. Takes his good health for mental vigour, and the satisfaction of his desires for a philosophy of life. And so on.

Perhaps he also took my silence for spellbound approbation!

*Night*—Jenny's letter just received.

Sorry now not to have written to her mother first, as I'd originally intended. Jenny says: "No." Gently but firmly: "No." She claims for herself, not without dignity, full responsibility for what she did. She gave herself freely to Jacques. His child must have no other father—even if merely in the eyes of the law. Jacques's wife should not remarry. She has no reason to apprehend her son's reproaches. And so forth.

Obviously my common sense proposals, far from convincing her, struck her as quite irrelevant, not to say narrow-minded. She doesn't say this in so many words, but several times alludes to "social conventions" and "old-fashioned prejudice," with evident disdain for all who stand by them.

Naturally I shan't leave it at that. Will try again, taking another line. If social conventions are negligible, why rebel against them? Surely that's ascribing to them an importance they do not possess. Above all, must stress this point: that it's not she but little Paul who is involved. I grant that the stigma still attaching to illegitimacy is absurd. But it exists. Once I can make her grasp that fact, she cannot hesitate to take my name and let me assume paternity of the child.

The circumstances are exceptional; my impending disappearance makes it all so easy!

No time to waste. Will try to answer her today.

Silly, too, not to have given her more detailed explanations, showing how simple it would be. She probably foresaw trouble, embarrassing moments. Must put it quite plainly: "All you have to do is to take the Riviera express one night. I'll meet you at Grasse. All will have been fixed up at the Registry Office. Two hours later you will take the train back to Paris, with everything shipshape."

*July 24*—Glad I wrote yesterday; did well not to leave it till today. Feeling rotten; this new treatment is most exhausting.

Absurd to think that all that's. needed to save the child a host of troubles in later life is a couple of brief entries in an official register! Can't believe it possible Jenny won't come round to my view.

*July 25*—Newspapers. We have occupied Château-Thierry. A German defeat, or a strategic retreat? The Swiss press asserts that Foch's push hasn't started yet, and what he's after now is merely to make things difficult for the Germans when they fall back—a theory which is borne out by the immobility of the British front.

Choking fits more frequent and alarming. Sharp fluctuations of temperature. Prostration.

*Saturday, July 27*—Bad night. Bad morning mail; Jenny is obdurate.

*Afternoon*—Injection; two full hours' respite.

Jenny's letter. She *will not* understand. To her mind this business of making a few entries in a register would be an act of apostasy. Typically feminine, her attitude! She writes: "I have not the slightest doubt that, if I could consult Jacques, he would be against any such concession to the most ignoble prejudices. I should feel I was betraying him …" And more in the same vein.

Irritating, all this time wasted in discussion. The longer she postpones her consent, the less fit I'll be to cope with all the preliminaries (collecting documents, arranging for the marriage to take place here, putting up the banns, etc.).

Not up to writing to her today. Have decided that, when I do, I shall follow her example and appeal to her feelings. Point out, for instance, how much easier in mind I'll be once I am definitely assured that little Paul will be spared needless handicaps in his career. Might even exaggerate my apprehensions, beg Jenny not to refuse me this last joy, and so forth.

*July 28*—Letter written and sent. Writing it a great strain.

*July 29*—Newspapers. Progrèss all along the line. The enemy dislodged from the Marne. From Fresnes, the La Fère wood, Villeneuve, and Roucheres, and Romigny, and Ville-en-Tardenois. How well I can remember all those places!

*In the garden*—This is the scene before my eyes. On all sides lie other gardens resembling ours, with orange trees like small green balloons, lemon trees, olive trees, eucalyptuses with slashed, scarred trunks, feathery tamarisks, broad-leafed plants of the rhubarb species, and urns pouring out cataracts of roses and geraniums. A blaze of colour; all the hues of the rainbow. Each of the houses within sight is limewashed a different tint, pink, mauve, orange-red, or merely white, and glistens in the sunlight across the cypress-hedges. The red tiles strike a vivid contrast with the blue of the sky. Wooden verandas painted brown, violet, or dark green add a gentler touch of colour. The nearest house, just on the right, is ochre-yellow with bright-blue shutters; another house near by, a garish white with apple-green sunblinds, and the one wall in shadow, purplish blue.

How good it would be to have one's home, a long life before one, in this pleasant place!

In the black file of cypress trees, a vagrant sunbeam, striking the insulating-cups of a telegraph-pole, kindles a blaze of almost blinding light.

*July 30, evening*—Went downstairs again this morning. Had not been able to do so for the last two days.

Felt all at sea, bewildered. Now that I am cut off from the future, I look on life and on those around me with new eyes, the eyes of one for whom the world of man has become something amazing and incomprehensible.

Our advance, it seems, is held up. And, to crown all, Russia (Lenin) has declared war on the Allies.

*Later*—A memory. After Father's death I took his notepaper to my flat. Three months later, when I was writing to the Chief, on turning the sheet, I found the beginning of a letter in Father's hand. "Monday. Dear Sir, Your letter reached me this morning only, and …" A shock that gave me! As if I had trodden on the heels of death! His tiny, meticulous handwriting, those few posthumous words, that busy life becalmed for ever …!

*August 1*—Our offensive in Le Tardenois still in progress. Victory in sight at last? But what is it costing us in lives? Big advance between Soissons and Reims. Bardot has had a letter from a friend on the Somme front; he says preparations are being made for another Franco-British push east of Amiens. (Amiens in August 1914. What a muddle everywhere! I turned it to account, anyhow. The quantity of cocaine and morphine I managed to swipe, with young Ruault's help, from the base hospital dispensary, to replenish our first-aid station! And how handy it came in, a fortnight later, during the Battle of the Marne!)

The Chamber has voted to call up the eighteen-year-olds; among them Eddie, I suppose. Poor boy, he has still more reason to wish himself back at the Fontanin Hospital!

*August 2*—No hope left of overcoming Jenny's scruples. This time her "No" is final. A short letter, very affectionate, but irrevocably firm. Can't be helped. (The days when I refused to know when I was beaten are far away. Am beaten now, and know it!) She represents her refusal as a matter of principle, and, what's more, revolutionary principle! Goes so far as to write: "Paul is a bastard. He will remain a bastard, and if his illegitimacy brings Jacques's child into conflict with society at an early age, so much the better. His father would not have wished a better start in life for his son." (It may be so. Anyhow, so be it! And may the spirit of revolt that inspired Jacques in his lifetime triumph after his death!)

*August 3, night*—The time I like best for writing. I feel more clear-headed than by day; more alone with my thoughts.

Jenny's letters. Leaving aside the notions underlying them, I am bound to recognize they form a perfectly coherent whole. They lack neither forcefulness nor dignity; they inspire respect.

These lines for Paul:

Some day, my boy, you may be moved to read the "posthumous papers" of Uncle Antoine, and you will wonder at these letters. As for the difference of opinion between your mother and myself, you will unhesitatingly take her part, I know. So be it. All the courage, the magnanimity, is on her side, not on mine. And yet I ask you to try to understand, to see that in my insistence there was something more than a feeble surrender to "bourgeois" prejudice or to sordidly "practical" considerations. The rising generation—yours—will have, I fear, to grapple with tremendous difficulties of every order, which may well, for a long while, prove insuperable. Compared with which the difficulties we were up against, your father and myself, were mere child's-play. This prospect, my dear Paul, fills me with dismay; as does the knowledge that I shall not be there to give you a helping hand. That is why it would have been a great consolation to feel that I had done something, what little I could, to help you through. To be able to tell myself that, by enabling you to use my name, your father's name, I had cleared your path of one of the obstacles that lie before you, the only one that it was in my power to remove—and of which I should like to think, as your mother does, that I am somewhat exaggerating the importance.

*August 4*—Soissons retaken. They had held it since the end of March. So now we are on the Aisne and the Vesle, facing Fismes. (Fismes, too, calls up memories. It was there I ran into Saunders's brother, who was going up the line—and never returned.)

A wise speech by old Lansdowne. Will he be listened to? By the way things are going I should say (Gorain thinks so too) a peace move will be made before the winter. But Clemenceau will turn a deaf ear so long as he has not played his last card—the Americans.

In Russia, too, events seem to be moving fast. There has been an Allied landing at Archangel; the Japs are at Vladivostok. But so little information is let through that it's impossible to make head or tail of what is happening in Russia.

*Night*—Sègre back from Marseille. At G.H.Q. they say that the first phase of the Allied counter-offensive, begun on the 18th, is drawing to a close. All objectives have been reached; the Oise-Meuse front is straightened out, so that no salient is now exposed to a surprise attack. Are we going to dig ourselves in on this new line and stay there all winter?

*August 5*—Should I congratulate myself on the effects of Mazet's new sedative? No effect on my insomnia. But my pulse has steadied down; my nerves are in a much calmer state. Mentally, too, there is improvement; I can think much more lucidly. (Or so it seems to me.) Sleepless nights, but, to tell the truth, almost pleasant ones compared with others I recall. And propitious for "diarizing."

Joseph has gone on leave. Replaced by old Ludovic. Dreadfully garrulous; talks one's head off! When he comes to do my room, I bolt! But this morning, having to stay in bed for a cauterization, I was at his mercy. His conversation was all the more tiresome because interspersed with hiccups, grunts, and gasps, owing to the fact that, in an access of unwonted zeal, he had set to polishing my floor. With polishing-pads strapped to his feet, he performed a sort of sailor's jig around the room, gabbling away all the time.

Described his childhood in Savoy. Kept on repeating: "Those were the good days, sir!" (Yes, Ludovic old boy, I know all about that! I say the same thing to myself each time some memory of the past, even a disagreeable one, crosses my mind.)

He uses colourful expressions, like Clotilde, but of a different type, less rustic. One of the things he told me was that his father had been a "piece-fitter." This, I learn, is the name given in wholesale tailoring establishments to the workman who trims and fits together the pieces of cloth roughed out

by the cutter. A good term. Lots of people (people like Jacques) would do well to call in a piece-fitter for their thoughts, to co-ordinate the scraps of knowledge they have amassed.

In one of her last letters Jenny speaks of Jacques and his "doctrine." No term could be less apt. I haven't the least intention of starting a discussion with her on the subject. But it strikes me as rather ominous for little Paul's upbringing that she should regard as a doctrine the more or less disconnected views Jacques may have aired when he was with her and which she now remembers more or less correctly!

If ever, Paul, you read these lines, please don't run away with the notion that your Uncle Antoine regarded your father's theories of life as incoherent. I merely wish to say that your father, like all impulsive people, gave an impression of having divergent, often contradictory ideas, which he found it none too easy to reconcile. This much I know: he never quite succeeded in shaping them into a logical, clearly formulated system or in giving them a well-defined direction. Similarly, his personality was composed of diverse, conflicting tendencies, all equally imperious (that was what gave it its extraordinary many-sidedness) ; and he found it hard to choose between them, never could weld them into a harmonious whole. That was the reason for his unceasing "mental strife," the feverish unrest which characterized him.

Perhaps all of us are, to a varying extent, in a like case. By "us" I mean those who have never accepted a cut-and-dried system, those who, at a certain stage of their development, have neglected to adopt once for all an organized philosophy or a religion—a stable bedrock for their mental processes. The result is that people of our type are constrained to revise periodically all the fundamentals of their thinking and rebuild it as best they can on makeshift bases.

*August 6, 7 p.m.*—Old Ludovic. The same fat fingers that have just inserted and withdrawn the thermometer for No. 49, and cleaned the spittoons of Nos. 55 and 57, now drop a lump of sugar into my lime-blossom tea, after being plunged into the sugar-bowl. And I say: "Thank you, Ludovic… ."

A poorish day. But I've lost the right to grumble.

This evening, an injection. Respite.

*Night*—Insomnia. Little pain, however.

A trifle off the mark, what I wrote yesterday for you, Paul—so far as it concerns myself. You might gather that my life was a constant struggle to achieve mental stability. Quite otherwise. Thanks, presumably, to my profession, I always felt at peace with myself, had little use for "soul-searchings."

About myself:

Fairly early (during my first year as a medical student, in fact) I managed to adjust my various tendencies, to shape my life and thought in a congenial mould, and accept (while adhering to no religious dogma or philosophic system) a sort of private moral code. The mould in which I shaped my life was, perhaps, restricted, but I did not feel cramped in it. Rather, it gave me a certain peace of mind. I came to look on living contentedly within the limits it imposed as a precondition of making good in my profession. Thus, at quite an early age, I settled down to the observance of set principles (I call them "principles," forced and pretentious as the term may sound, for want of a better word) which tallied with my natural predilections and my medical career. Mine was, in sum, the rather rudimentary "philosophy" of a typical "man of action," based on a cult of energy, willpower, and the like.

For the pre-war period of my life, anyhow, all this is strictly true. True, too, for the war period up to the time when I got my first wound. Then only (during my convalescence at the Saint-Dizier Hospital) I began to question certain lines of thought and conduct which had ensured for me so far a relative stability of outlook, and enabled me to get the last ounce out of myself when the occasion called for it.

Tired. Reluctant to carry on with this attempt at self-analysis. Lack of training. The further I proceed, the more I realize that what I've said about myself is questionable; I'm throwing dust in my own eyes.

For instance, I cast my mind back to some of the most important acts of my life, and I find that the ones I embarked on most spontaneously were in flagrant contradiction with my famous "principles"! At each of those crucial moments I took a line that my "ethics" did not justify. Some secret force within suddenly impelled me to take that line—a force that overrode all preconceived ideas, my plan for living. The result being usually that I came to feel less sure of my "ethics" and of myself. I even caught myself wondering if I really were the man I thought myself to be. Still, I must admit, those moods of self-questioning passed almost instantaneously and did not prevent me from resuming my stand on my old ground.

Reviewing these things tonight, in solitude and in perspective, I see pretty clearly that these rules of life and my practice of abiding by them tended to warp my personality and that, though I had no wish to do so, I had made of them a sort of mask. And the habit of wearing it had gradually modified my natural temperament. In the normal course of my existence (which allowed me little time for introspection) I adapted myself easily enough to this artificial self I had concocted. But at certain critical moments, when I was moved to act spontaneously, the steps I took were obviously reactions of my authentic self which, throwing off the mask, revealed the man within.

(Glad to have cleared up that point—at last!)

I expect it is the same with many people. From which it follows that, if we want to discover a man's true character, we should observe, not his normal conduct, but those unthinking acts—seemingly inexplicable and occasionally scandalous—which he does "in spite of himself." For only at these moments does a man betray his real self.

Am inclined to think that Jacques's case was the opposite of mine. In his case it was the innermost, authentic self that as a general rule directed the course of his life. Which would explain the striking instability of his temperament, the difficulty one had in foreseeing his reactions, and their seeming incoherence.

A glimmer of dawn on the windowpane. Another night gone; one night less. Will try to doze off now. (For once I hardly regret the sleepless hours.)

*August 8, out of doors*—82.5° in the shade. Intense, but dry, invigorating heat. Wonderful climate. Could never understand why so great a part of mankind has settled in the bleak, inhospitable North. Just now, at lunch, listened to them talking over their plans for the future. They all think, or make believe they think, that a man who has been gassed isn't handicapped for life. And they also think they can resume their lives at the exact point where they left off when mobilized. As though peace would be the signal for the world to slip back automatically into its soft pre-war groove. Poor fellows, I'm afraid they're in for a rude awakening!

But what amazes me most is the way they talk about their "jobs" in civilian life. Never as a man does who has chosen a career because he likes it and it suits him. No, they talk as schoolboys talk about their lessons; sometimes, indeed, as an ex-convict might talk about a sentence of hard labour. A pity, to my thinking. There's nothing worse than starting life without feeling drawn to a vocation. (Or only one thing worse: starting out with the wrong vocation.)

*For Paul:*

Beware of choosing the wrong vocation. So many wasted lives, so many cases of a soured old age, are due to missed vocations!

I picture you in adolescence, sixteen or seventeen. The age when, above all, the mind is in a ferment. The age when your intellect will awake, take stock of itself, and form the wildest estimates of its capacities. The age when your heart too, perhaps, will begin to make its voice heard, and its wayward emotions will be difficult to control. The age when, dazed and dazzled by the new horizons opening before it, your mind will be at a loss to choose among so many glorious possibilities. And this is the age when youth, weak still but thinking itself strong, and "hot for certainties," for guide-marks in the maze of life, embraces eagerly the first assurance that presents itself. But—beware! For this, too, is the age (though you may not suspect it) when your imagination will be most apt to distort reality, even to lead you into mistaking the false for the true. You will tell yourself: "I know …"; "I feel definitely convinced …"; and so forth. But don't forget that a youngster of seventeen is often like a pilot steering by a badly regulated compass. He is absolutely certain that his adolescent impulses are flashes of pure insight, that he may take them as sure guides and set his course accordingly. He never suspects that as a rule he is being led haphazard by caprices of the moment and that the ideas which seem to him so startlingly original are usually secondhand—a farrago of notions picked up in chance encounters from people he has known or books that have come under his eyes.

Will you steer clear of these pitfalls? I must admit I fear for you! And I wonder if you will listen to my advice… .

To begin with, I hope you will not be too much inclined to brush aside impatiently the opinions expressed by your teachers, by those who are near and dear to you. They may seem not to understand you, yet quite likely they may know you better than you know yourself. And if their homilies get on your nerves, don't forget the reason may be that deep in your heart you feel they are well founded!

But especially I ask you to be on your guard against yourself. Always have in mind the risk of forming wrong ideas about your character and being misled by appearances. Practise sincerity at your own expense; that's the best way of keeping your wits alert and serviceable. Another thing you should try to bear in mind is this: in the case of young men of your stamp (I mean the educated type, whose minds are shaped to a great extent by books and heart-to-heart conversations with intelligent companions of their own age) theories on life and the human sentiments always precede experience. Their imagination enables them to conjure up mentally a host of sensations with which, so far, they have had no direct personal contacts. But this they fail to realize; they mistake *knowing for experiencing*. They believe that they personally experience cravings and emotions which they merely know *that others feel*.

Next there's this business of a vocation. When you were ten or twelve, I dare say, you believed you were cut out for a sailor or explorer—because you had been thrilled by adventure stories you had read. Older and wiser now, you smile at those childish fancies. But at sixteen or seventeen one is apt to make very similar mistakes. Take my advice, and fight shy of sudden enthusiasms; don't be in a hurry to believe yourself an artist, or a man of action, or the hero of a unique romance, just because you have been moved to admire, in books or real life, great poets, men who have "done things," or splendid lovers. No, it is a long, weary task discovering one's real bent, and I advise you to go about it patiently, methodically. Many make the discovery too late; some never at all. Therefore, you should take your time, refuse to let yourself be "rushed." A lot of exploratory work is needed before one can find out *who* one really is. But the moment you have found yourself, discard without delay everything in your make-up that is not truly yours. Take yourself as you are, with all your failings and limitations, but spare no pains in developing your potentialities on normal, healthy lines along their appropriate channels. For self-knowledge and self-acceptance do not mean taking the line of least resistance or ceasing to improve oneself. Quite the contrary; they give a man the best chance of getting the utmost out of himself, for his energies are thus canalized in the right direction and all his efforts increasingly serve a purpose. One should enlarge one's frontiers as far as possible—but only after making sure that they are one's natural frontiers. The man who, so the phrase goes, makes a mess of his life is usually someone who, starting off with a wrong conception of his personality, chooses a path of life which is unsuitable for him; or else one who, having started in the right direction, has not been able, or has lacked the self-discipline, to keep within the bounds assigned to him by nature.

*August 9*—An optimistic speech by Lloyd George. The note of optimism exaggerated probably for reasons of expediency. All the same, what has been happening on the French front during the last three weeks exceeds our wildest hopes. (Brings back my talk with Rumelles in the spring.) Yesterday, it seems, we took the offensive in Picardy. And the Americans are coming into action. Pershing's plan appears to be to let Foch straighten up our front line and put Paris out of danger; then, while the French and British armies hold the old front, to make a big American drive toward Alsace, with a view to crossing the frontier and invading Germany. That day, rumour goes, the war will come to a rapid end, thanks to a new gas which can be employed only in enemy territory as it destroys everything, makes it impossible for the land to produce for several years, and so forth. (General jubilation in the mess—all these unhappy gas-victims, many of whom will never recover, crowing over the possibilities of this new gas!)

*August 10*—Have regained somewhat my taste for reading; find I can concentrate pretty easily on what I read, especially at night. Just finished an excellent article by an English physician on the aftereffects of mustard-gas poisoning as compared with those of other gases. His observations bear mine out in many respects (e.g., as to secondary infections tending to become chronic). Was tempted to write to him, enclosing some pages of my case-history. But I would rather not embark on an exchange of letters; too uncertain of being able to keep it up. Still, since the ist I have felt definitely better. No real improvement, of course, but I have been suffering less. A lull. Compared with that of the preceding weeks my present state is fairly tolerable—if it weren't for the exhausting treatment every morning, my difficulty in breathing (especially acute at sunset), and my insomnia. Still, I find the insomnia less trying when I am up to reading, as during the last few nights. Thanks, also, to this diary.

*Forenoon*—Standing at my window. Most impressive, the landscape spread out before me, with its majestically rolling hillsides terraced with narrow strips of cultivated land. The green slopes are ribboned with parallel line of chalky white, the dry-stone walls between the terraces. And high above stands sharp against the sky a rugged diadem of rocks, pumice-grey, faceted with gleams of mauve and orange-red. In the far distance, rather lower, where the green merges into grey, is a little village stepped along a gorge, like a handful of white pebbles lodged in a furrow. And just now big fleecy clouds are passing overhead, chequering the vivid green expanse with slowly moving drifts of shadow… . How many weeks are left to me for gazing at all this beauty?

*August 11*—Mazet is a doctor of the same persuasion as Major Dezavelles, the medical officer at Saint-Dizier, who refused to have anything to do with men whom he had "sensed" as hopeless cases. "A good leech," he once said to me, "needs flair. He must spot the exact moment when a patient ceases to be 'interesting.' "

Am I still "interesting" from Mazet's point of view? And if I am, how long shall I remain so? Since Langlois developed his abscess, Mazet has ceased going to see him.

The Somme offensive is shaping up well. The English, it seems, are set on doing their bit. The Santerre plateau has been recaptured, the Paris-Amiens line placed out of danger. A battle is in progress at Montdidier. (What memories of 1916 are linked up for me with those names, Montdidier, Lassigny, Ressons-sur-Matz, etc.!)

Goiran very optimistic. Insists that the tide is now flowing steadily in our favour. I agree. (What's happening must be a considerable surprise to quite a number of people—our leaders, military and civil, to begin with, who know how close a shave we had last spring. Well, they're holding their heads high again these days, we may be sure. Let's only hope they're not holding them *too* high!)

*August 12, night*—Spent the afternoon copying certain portions of my case-history to send with my letter to that English doctor.

War news. The British are nearing Peronne. Poor Peronne! What's left of it today? Remember so well the 1914 evacuation, the town deprived of light, hand-lanterns flitting along the streets, the cavalry in retreat—the men half dead with fatigue, the horses limping. And that row of stretchers laid on the ground floor of the Town Hall and extending onto the sidewalk.

*August 13, night*—Breathing more troublesome today. However, have finished the notes I am sending to England.

This perusal of my case-history has left me with a good—not to say excellent—impression of it. The progress of the disease is clearly traced, as on a graph. A factual record of considerable importance. Unique, I should imagine. It may come to be regarded as authoritative and used as a basis for research for many years to come. Must fight down the temptation of cutting things short prematurely. It's up to me to wait as long as I possibly can, so as to continue my analysis up to the final stage. Thus I shall leave behind me something of use, anyhow: a full clinical history of a case of this rare type, regarding which so little is known at present.

There are times when this thought is a great standby. But there are others when it's all I can do to find a tiny grain of comfort in it.

*1 a.m.*—Curious, the tricks that memory plays on one. It's interesting, when one's embarked on a train of thought, to call a sudden halt and retrace the sequence of associated ideas up to the starting-point. For instance, this evening just as Ludovic came in with the dinner-tray, the metal cap of the

salt-cellar dropped off and fell tinkling onto the plate. I hardly noticed it at the time. But all evening, during my treatment, while I was getting ready for the night, and even when I was copying out my clinical notes, my mind was full of thoughts of Father.

A host of old, half-effaced images came crowding back upon me: gloomy dinners at our house in the Rue de l'Université, Mile, de Waize's little hands resting on the tablecloth, our Sunday lunches at Maisons-Laffitte with the windows open and the garden bathed in sunlight. Why? I know the reason now. The tinkle of the metal cap falling on the plate had automatically recalled a noise I used to hear regularly at the beginning of each family meal, when, as Father settled heavily into his chair, his eyeglasses swinging on their ribbon hit the rim of his plate.

I feel I should set down some notes on Father, for Paul's benefit. No one is ever likely to speak to him about his father's father.

Father was little loved—even by his sons. He was a very difficult man to love. I judged him with much harshness and, I suspect, did him less than justice. Today it seems to me that what made him so unlovable was an insistence on the less attractive side of certain rugged virtues and a moral inflexibility carried to excess. I cannot quite bring myself to write that his life compelled one's admiration, and yet, viewed from one angle, it was obviously devoted wholly to doing good, as he saw it. His defects set everyone against him and his very real virtues won no liking. In fact, the way he put them into practice roused more antipathy than the worst shortcomings would have done. I believe he was aware of this and that the knowledge of his isolation made him suffer terribly.

Some day, my dear Paul, I must make an effort to explain to you the sort of man your grandfather Oscar Thibault was.

*August 14, morning*—More gossip from old Ludovic. Just now, placing his fat paw on his moustache, he mumbled confidentially: "Would you believe it, sir? Lieutenant Darros ain't nothing but a faker!"

Naturally I protested. Ludovic took on a knowing air. "I got eyes in my head, sir." And he proceeded to explain that, when Darros wasstaying in the annex, he had caught him faking his temperature. He always took a good quarter of an hour's violent exercise before inserting the thermometer, and when marking up his temperature on the chart added a degree or so.

I protested, but …! Have myself noticed some suspicious circumstances. In the inhaling-room, for instance, Darros is always very slack about his treatment. Stops it the moment Bardot's back is turned. Usually shirks the exercises he is supposed to do by himself. Such remissness all the stranger as Darros is always worrying about his health and often asks me what I think of his chances of recovery, about which he himself is definitely pessimistic. Darros has no lesions, but his bronchi are in a bad state and show no sign of improvement.

*Late afternoon*—In the kitchen-garden. I like being here. Shadows of the cypresses on the paths. Trim grass borders. Wattle fences. Tinkle of the Persian wheel. Pierre and Vincent moving to and fro with watering-cans.

Still obsessed by Ludovic's "revelations." Suppose they're true? Suppose Darros is a malingerer—what then? Is he acting in a disgraceful way?

No easy problem. All depends on the angle from which one views it. For Ludovic, whose two sons have fallen in the war, it's obviously disgraceful; worse, a crime, an act of desertion. I've no doubt he thinks Darros should be court-martialled. To Darros's father, too, such conduct would probably seem disgraceful. (I know him slightly. He sometimes comes to see his son. A clergyman in Avignon; a patriotic old puritan. Forced his youngest son to enlist.) Yes, certainly for Darros senior it's a wicked thing to do. But for Bardot, for instance? He has been treating Darros for the last four months and has grown to like him. Suppose he noticed something, would he take action or shut his eyes? And Darros himself—if he is really guilty of malingering, has he the feeling he is doing wrong?

And I, how do I feel about it? Is it a rotten thing to do? Certainly I can't approve of it. Have an instinctive aversion for the fakers one comes across in hospitals who do all they can not to get well. But I can't bring myself to say outright that such conduct is "wrong."

A queer business. Might be interesting to try to clarify my ideas on the subject… . Right or wrong?

First I note this: even if I found him guilty of malingering, I should go on liking Darros. He is intelligent, cultivated, gentle-minded, and I regard him as a thoroughly decent young fellow. In fact, I respect him, even if he is (as Ludovic would have it) a "faker." He has often spoken about himself to me with the utmost frankness; told me about his father, his childhood days, and his Protestant upbringing—so appallingly puritanical on the sexual side. About his married life too. I well remember the description he gave of his experiences at Lyon on the eve of mobilization. He and his wife were on their way back from Avignon, where they had been on vacation. Darros was due to rejoin his regiment on the following day at dawn. After much searching they found a room in a small, squalid hotel. The whole town was in a state of feverish excitement. I can still hear his voice when he said to me: "Therese was trembling with fear, gritting her teeth to keep from breaking down. I spent the night in her arms, sobbing like a child. Never shall I forget those tragic hours. She gently stroked my hair but could not bring herself to speak. And all night long there was an infernal din in the street outside, artillery trains clattering over the cobbles without a moment's break."

A malingerer, perhaps; but not a coward. Forty months' active service in the infantry, cited three times in dispatches, twice wounded and finally gassed at Les Hauts-de-Meuse. Married six months before the outbreak of war. A delicate wife. A child. No private means. An ill-paid schoolteaching job at Marseille. He was gassed (slightly) in February last. At a convalescent home in Troyes to begin with; his wife came and joined him there, and married life began again for them (a fact which, to my mind, has its relevance). After a month or so they transferred him here, hundreds of miles from the front. How well I can picture his feelings when he found himself back in the South, in this genial climate, under these blue skies! If he finally resolved to do all he could to protract his convalescence as long as possible—and who can tell whether peace may not be nearer than most of us imagine?—I feel sure that a Protestant of the best stamp such as Darros must have had the matter out with his conscience before deciding on such a course. If finally he chose to save his skin at all costs (even at the risk of letting his disease grow worse through neglect), was he doing wrong or was he right?

Who can say?

No, even if he is malingering, I decline to think less of him.

*Midnight*—Insomnia. Dark hours teeming with interminable meditations. A sort of instinct of self-preservation enables me, whenever this is not utterly impossible, to divert my attention from myself, from my "ghosts."

Darros again. Rather serious, this Darros business, when one looks into it. Serious, I mean, *for* me. For it conjures up problems affecting me personally.

Incidentally, I find that I no longer believe in responsibility.

Did I ever really believe in it? Yes, as far as it's possible for a medical man to do so. For us doctors the frontiers of responsibility are never situated quite at the same point as that assigned by public opinion. (I remember the arguments on the subject I used to have at Verneuil with a medico-legal expert, serving as assistant medical officer in a local regiment.) We doctors know only too well that men's acts are the outcome of character and environment. Are we responsible for our heredity or upbringing, for the examples given us in our youth, or its conditions? Most obviously not.

Still, I have always acted as if I fully believed in my personal responsibility. And I had a very strong sense (due to a Christian education?) of merit and demerit. With lapses, however. I had a tendency to hold myself relatively irresponsible when I had done wrong and to claim the full merit of my good deeds.

A lot of inconsistencies in all this.

*For Paul:*

Don't worry overmuch about inconsistencies. They are vexatious, but a healthy sign. I have noticed that it was precisely when my mind was tossed this way and that by contradictory ideas that I felt nearest that Truth, with a capital T, which always lies just around the corner.

Could I have another lease of life, I'd like to live it under the sign of Doubt.

The biological viewpoint: during the early years of the war I yielded—disgustedly, it is true—to the temptation of treating its moral and social issues as mere biological data. A crude method, leading me to such observations as: Man is a bloodthirsty brute by nature; a rigid social system is needed to

check his depredation; nothing better can be hoped of him. I even carried about in my haversack one of old Fabre's natural-history books (unearthed in a bookshop at Compiègne). Found a gloomy satisfaction in regarding men, myself included, as large, ferocious insects equipped for carnage, for attack and defence, conquest and internecine slaughter. Told myself ragefully: "Anyhow, let this war open your eyes, you sentimental fool, and teach you to see things as they are. The universe: a complex of blind forces fighting their way to equilibrium by destruction of the weaker elements. Nature: a shambles in which individuals and species, antagonized by instinct, prey on each other *ad infinitum*. No good or evil, no right or wrong. No more for man than for the weasel or the bird of prey."

How can a man whose duty keeps him in an ambulance packed with wounded deny that might triumphs over right? (More definite memories. A nightfall in Le Cateau. The hour I passed crouching behind a wall during the attack on Peronne. The first-aid station at Nanteuil-le-Haudouin. The death-agony of those young fellows from the Rifle Brigade in a barn between Verdun and Calonne.) I recall times when, in sheer desperation, I bemused myself with this biological view of human life.

A shortsighted view. The sense of utter hopelessness which possessed me at those moments should have served as a warning that such thoughts drag a man down into an abyss whence there is no escaping.

Will turn out the light now, and try to sleep a bit.

*1 a.m.*—Sleep definitely "off" tonight. That nice fellow Darros (little he suspects it!) is responsible for the fact that I've been racking my brain with "moral problems" for the last fifteen hours—more time than I've given to them in my whole previous life.

Quite literally I had no time for such problems. Good and evil were for me conventional terms, counters which served in conversation, but to which I attributed no real value. And devoid of all imperative significance for me. I subscribed to the code of traditional morality—for others. I subscribed to it in this sense: that if some successful revolutionary group were proposing to abolish them and did me the honour of asking my advice, I should probably have urged the unwisdom of sapping all at once these tried foundations of the social order. They seemed to me quite arbitrary, but of great practical service for regulating the dealings of my fellow-men among themselves. As for myself, however, in my dealings with myself, I totally ignored them.

(I can't help wondering how I should have summed up my personal rule of life, had I been asked to do so—a summing up for which I never had the leisure or, indeed, the inclination. I imagine that I would have kept to some rather elastic formula on these lines: "All that stimulates the life-force within me and promotes my development is good; everything that hinders me from making the most of my capacities is evil." But I'd need to define exactly what is meant by "life-force" and "making the most of my capacities." I give it up!)

Actually the people (if any) who have watched my way of living—Jacques or Philip, for instance—have had few opportunities of observing the almost complete freedom I accorded myself in theory. For in my acts I have always (though without giving a thought to it) kept to the path of what is known as respectability, the line of conduct followed by all "decent people." Nevertheless, on certain occasions—rare, I grant; not more than two or three in fifteen years—at certain critical moments of my private or professional life, I have suddenly grown aware that my emancipation from convention was not merely theoretical. On these exceptional occasions I found myself transported, as it were, onto a plane where the rules of conduct that I normally observed were a dead letter; a plane on which even reason ceased to function, instinct and intuition reigned supreme. It was a region of what might be called transcendent chaos, its atmosphere was pure and bracing, and in it I felt gloriously alone, masterful, sure of myself. Above all, sure of myself. For I had an extraordinarily vivid impression of having suddenly come very near to … Hard to finish this sentence; let's say … to what would be, for a God, absolute Truth. (Capitalized again!) Yes, at least three or four times to my knowledge I have consciously and deliberately violated the most widely accepted rules of morality, and never felt the least twinge of remorse. I still look back on those incidents with complete detachment, without a shadow of regret. In any case, I can truly say that remorse is something outside my experience. I account for this by an innate disposition to regard my thoughts and acts, whatever they may be, as so many natural phenomena. And, as such, legitimate.

Feel particularly in the mood for writing tonight. And splendidly clear-headed. If I have to pay for it with a bad day tomorrow, so be it!

Have read the above remarks again and spent some time pondering over—and around—them.

Among others, put this question to myself: In the case of the average person, who gets through life without committing any signal breaches of the accepted moral code, what is it that restrains him from doing so? For hardly any normal man escapes the temptation of committing acts now and then that pass for "immoral." Obviously I do not have in mind believers, all such as deep religious faith or a philosophic creed enables to resist the "Tempter's wiles." But how about the others? What is it holds them back? Timidity, fear of the law or of getting a bad name, apprehension of the possible repercussions of such acts on their private or public lives? All these factors operate, I do not doubt, and are formidable safeguards of morality, which a great many of the "tempted" are not disposed to challenge. But all these are obstacles of a material order. Were there no others, none of a spiritual order, it might be urged that all that keeps the average man (assuming he has thrown off the yoke of religion) in the narrow path is fear of the policeman or, anyhow, of ill-repute. From which it would follow logically enough that every unbeliever tempted to "do wrong," provided he felt quite sure of not being found out and that he ran no risk of punishment, would promptly yield to the temptation and might even feel a certain zest in "scoring off" the moral code. Which is tantamount to saying that for the unbeliever there exist no considerations of a moral order capable of restraining him from wrongdoing; that for a man who does not subscribe to any God-given law, to any religious or philosophical belief, there exists no valid moral interdiction.

By way of parenthesis: this would seem to bear out the view of those who explain the moral sense (conscience) and the distinction that we all draw spontaneously between what one ought and what one ought not to do—between right and wrong—as being the survival in modern man of a self-discipline, inculcated in the first instance by religion and carried on from generation to generation till it has become second nature. That may well be so. But it seems to me that those who uphold this theory overlook one important fact: that "God" is ultimately a man-made hypothesis. And thus it cannot be God, a product of the human mind, who in the first instance imposed this distinction between right and wrong; on the contrary, it is man who has fathered it on God and promoted it to a divine ordinance. In short, when we say the moral law has a religious origin, we merely mean that at some early stage of his development man thought fit to ascribe it to his Creator. And therefore that he had it in himself to start with. Indeed, the sense of right and wrong must have been most profoundly rooted in his nature for him to have felt that impulse to endow it with the highest, most absolute authority.

What, then, is the solution?

*4 a.m.*—Overcome by weariness midway in my "parenthesis." Two solid hours' sleep. I owe them to this diary—and to my philosophic divagations.

Have forgotten what I was leading up to. "What, then, is the solution?" What, indeed! Still, I had the impression (illusion?) that I was groping my way toward one. Only, on waking, I can't pick up the thread of my ideas.

The problem of conscience and its origin. Why should it not be the survival of a social habit? (Quite likely this explanation is as old as the hills, and no discovery of mine. No matter; it's new to me.)

I am quite unable to accept the theory that human conscience derives from some divine commandment, and far more inclined to take the view that, having originated at an early stage of man's existence, it has survived the causes which brought it into being and now, by virtue of tradition and heredity, is firmly rooted in us. I see it as a relic of the experiments primitive human groups were led to make when organizing communal life and settling relations among their members. A survival, in fact, of a rough-and-ready penal code. And it is rather flattering for one's human self-esteem to be able to tell oneself that this distinction we make between good and evil, the "voice of conscience"—a voice which often gives ridiculous orders and yet somehow compels us to obey them, which on occasion guides our conduct when reason balks and falters, and leads the wisest of us to do things which reason, called to judgment, could not justify—I find it rather attractive to regard what we call conscience as the survival of an instinct necessary and peculiar to the "social animal" that is man. An instinct that has persisted since the dawn of civilization and thanks to which mankind progresses steadily toward a perfect state.

*August 15, in the garden*—Glorious weather. Bells ringing for vespers. Everywhere a holiday atmosphere. Almost blatant, this gaiety of nature: of dazzling sky and flowers, horizons shimmering in the heat-haze. One has a spiteful impulse to shake one's fist at all this beauty, invoke disaster, shatter it! No, rather to escape from it, to shrink back into oneself, one's suffering self!

A great council of war is taking place at Spa; the Kaiser and his Chiefs of Staff in conference. Three lines in a Swiss paper. Nothing in the French papers. Yet this well may be an epoch-making date, one that schoolboys will have to memorize, a turning-point in the Great War.

Goiran says that many of the Foreign Office high officials are predicting the war will be over before next winter.

Not much in the communiqué. The suspense weighs on one like a brooding storm.

*10 p.m.*—Read just now my elucubration of last night. Surprised, not to say shocked, by its prolixity. It brings out all too plainly my limitations. (But it shows, too, a weakness of the vocabulary we poor humans have built up. We employ the language of emotion, not of logic, however much we try to "rectify" it.)

*For Paul:*

Please remember, my dear Paul, that these desultory jottings are the work of an invalid, and you should not judge your Uncle Antoine by them. In any case, he never felt at ease in the byways of ideology; at the first step he went astray. I remember when I was working for my finals in philosophy at Louis-Le-Grand—the only examination I did not pass at my first try—how mortified I often felt. Like a coal-heaver juggling with soap-bubbles! And I realize that even the imminence of death has not sharpened my wits; I shall leave this world without having been able to overcome my utter incapacity for abstract speculation.

*Just at midnight*—Vigny's *Journal* which I am now reading does not bore me, yet every moment my attention wanders and the book slips from my fingers. An effect of insomnia on the nerves. My thoughts turn in a sad circle: death, the petty thing a life is, the petty thing a man; mysteries against which the mind comes up, on which it founders, trying to understand. And always that unanswerable question: What lies behind it all?

What lies behind the fact that a man like myself, emancipated from all moral codes, should have led a life which I may call exemplary, when I remember how my days were spent, all I gave up for my patients' sake, the pains I took in carrying out my duties?

(I'd vowed to keep clear of these problems, which I know my mind is not equipped to tackle. But now I doubt the wisdom of that course—if I want to get them out of my system.)

What motive lay behind those unselfish emotions, my conscientiousness and devotion to my work? … But one might as well ask for what motive a wounded lioness lets herself be shot down rather than abandon her cubs, or sensitive plants retract their leafage, or the white corpuscles make their amoeboid movements, or metals oxidize.

No "motive," nothing lies behind these things. Merely to state the question is to beg the question in such cases, to assume there is "something behind everything," to blunder into the spider's web of metaphysics. No, we must accept the limits of the knowable. The wise man dispenses with the whys, contents himself with the hows. (And has a full life's work coping with them!) Above all, one should cure oneself of the childish desire for everything to be explainable, to "fit in." Thus, in my case, I must give up trying to explain myself to myself as if I were a self-consistent unity. (For a long time I thought I was. Our Thibault pride? No; personal vanity.)

All the same, among the various attitudes feasible, there is one which I prefer: that of accepting the conventional moral standards without being taken in by them. One may approve of "order" and stand by it without necessarily regarding it as a moral obligation and without losing sight of the fact that it is no more than a practical necessity for collective life, the condition of a certain social welfare. I write "order" to avoid using such terms as "virtue" or "good conduct."

It's an irritating thing to feel that one is *under orders* all the time and yet make neither head nor tail of the system governing one's life! For a long while I imagined that some day I would hit on a solution of the mystery. Now I know that I must die without having found out anything to speak of—either about myself or about the outside world.

A believer would retort: "But it's so simple… ." Not for me!

Another access of exhaustion—but impossible to sleep. The hellish thing about insomnia is the combination of intense physical fatigue, a desperate craving for rest, with an uncontrollable mental activity which keeps sleep at bay. Have been tossing about on my bed for the last hour, during which time this thought has been running in my head: I've stood for optimism all my life; it would be absurd for me to die in a mood of doubt and gloom.

Optimism! Yes, that was the keynote of my life. A fact of which I may not have been conscious at the time, but which now I realize most vividly. That cheerfulness and brisk self-confidence which always buoyed me up came originally, I suspect, from my dealings with science and was stimulated daily by them.

Science is something more than mere knowledge. It is a desire to come to terms with the universe, whose laws it glimpses. And those who follow that path find it leads them to a wonderland infinitely vaster and more thrilling than the mystic's wildest visions. Science enables one to feel in close contact and in harmony with nature and her secrets.

A religious sentiment, this? The term, I own, grates on me, and yet—why not?

Faith, hope, and charity. One day Abbe Vecard pointed out to me that actually I practised these eminently Christian virtues! Naturally I protested. In a pinch I might own to hope and charity, but faith—absurd! I wonder now. If today I tried to justify this never-flagging zeal that kept me going at high pressure for fifteen years, and hit on an explanation of the indomitable confidence I had in my "mission," that explanation might well sound uncommonly like religious faith. But faith in what? Perhaps in the infinite capacities for progress of all forms of life. I believe in a universal movement toward ever-higher planes. Does this mean that, without my knowing it, I believe in a final cause "shaping our ends"? No matter. In any case, that is the only kind of teleology I can accept.

*August 16*—High temperature; respiration difficult, more wheezing. Had to fall back on the oxygen cylinder several times. Got out of bed, but did not go downstairs.

A visit from Goiran, who brought some newspapers. He still thinks the war will end next winter. Defends his views with much skill and vigour. Comic, the contrast between the cheerful theories he puts forth and the look of settled gloom he always wears—due to the small, close-set, vacillating eyes, the long, lean nose, and face grotesquely elongated like a greyhound's muzzle. Coughing and spitting all the time. Talked of his profession as though it bored him. Hardly believable. Teaching history of the Lycee Henri IV should not be a thankless task—far from it! Talked to me too of his student days at the Ecole Normale. The man is a confirmed carper; too fond of finding fault to take a just view of anything. Sometimes I feel his mind has been warped by too much intelligence or, rather, by a certain type of intelligence, indulgent to itself, but callous and ungenerous where others are concerned. Witty enough, however, on occasion.

Witty? There are two forms of wit: one comes from the thought that lies behind the sentiment expressed (e.g., Philip); the other from the way it's put. Goiran is one of those people who pass for witty though they really have nothing much to say. He gets his effects by tricks of elocution, by stressing unlikely words, by shifts of tone, by the use of epigrammatic, rather cryptic turns of speech, and by an ironic twinkle in his eye that hints at hidden meanings. One can repeat a remark of Philip's and it loses nothing of its originality and savour; it makes good every time. But if one repeated a sally of Goiran's it would fall flat, often as not.

*August 17*—More and more dyspncea. Had myself X-rayed. The plates showed that there is practically no movement of the diaphragm in deep respiration. Bardot is away on three days' leave. Feel ill, damnably ill, and can't think of anything else.

*August 19*—Bad days and still worse nights. Mazet is trying a new treatment in Bardot's absence.

*August 20*—Terribly knocked out by the new treatment.

*August 21*—Feel marvellously fitter this morning. Thanks to last night's injection, slept nearly five hours! Breathing definitely easier. Read the papers.

*Night*—Dozed all afternoon. This attack seems definitely staved off. Mazet delighted.

Haunted by memories of Rachel. Is it a symptom of decline, the hold that memories are getting on me nowadays? When I was "alive," I never indulged in them—I had no use for the past.

*For Paul:*

Morality. The moral life. It is for each of us to find out where his duty lies, to define its quality and scope. To decide on his *attitude*, abiding by his personal judgment and to this end engaging in a ceaseless quest, a continuous search. Patience and discipline are needed. For, without losing sight of reality, he must steer his way between the relative and the absolute, the possible artd the desirable, while listening to the voice of elemental wisdom that is in all of us.

He must safeguard his personality. He must not be afraid of making mistakes and contradicting himself time and again. He must take stock of his deficiencies so as to gain an increasing insight into himself and ascertain the task that fits him—his duty.

In the last analysis, one's only duty is toward oneself.

*August 21, morning*—Newspapers. The English making little progress. We are hardly doing better, despite some small local advances. (I write "small local advances," following the communiqué, but I can picture what those words mean for the men making them; I see them crawling up the communication trenches, shells bursting round them in no-man's land, first-aid stations packed with wounded.)

Got up for my treatment. Shall try to go down for lunch.

*Night*—Am writing by the light of a dim bedside lamp. Hoped to get a little sleep. Yesterday my temp, was down to almost normal. But it's near daybreak, and I've not had a wink of sleep, not a moment's unconsciousness. Still—a good night on the whole.

*August 22, morning*—A failure of the electric light prevented me from writing, as I'd intended, of the gorgeous display of shooting-stars we had last night.

It was so hot that at about one I rose and pulled up the blind. Back in bed, I feasted my eyes on the marvellous spectacle of the night sky streaming with tiny cataracts of golden fire, stars raining down in all directions. A celestial barrage! It brought to my mind the Somme offensive, those nights of 1916 in the Maréaucourt trenches; falling stars and English rockets meeting and crossing in the sky, like a fantastic firework display.

Suddenly it struck me—and I'm certain I was right—that an astronomer, whose spiritual home lies in the interplanetary spaces, must find dying a much less painful process than it is for other men.

Meditated for a long while on these things, gazing up at the sky, the boundless firmament that always recedes a little farther as our telescopes grow stronger. A wonderfully soothing meditation. That fathomless immensity in which a host of stars like our sun run their slow courses, and our sun itself—a million times, if I'm not mistaken, larger than the earth—is no more than a tiny unit of an untold multitude.

The Milky Way, stardust, a cloud of suns, round which wheel billions of planets, hundreds of millions of miles distant from one another. And all the nebulas from which new broods of suns are born. And the discoveries of astronomers that all this teeming mass of worlds is a mere drop in the ocean of infinite space, in an all-pervading ether traversed by radiations, waves of energy, of which we know absolutely nothing.

Merely to write about it makes one's mind dizzy. A healthful dizziness. Last night for the first time (perhaps the last) I managed to think about my death with a sort of serenity, with vast, superb indifference. All regrets fell away, and I felt already free of the frail husk of life that is my body. And saw myself as a minute, utterly insignificant particle of matter.

Resolved to gaze at the sky each night to recapture this serenity.

Dawn is breaking. Another day.

*Afternoon, in the garden*—An absurd thrill of gratitude toward this diary as I open it again. Never has it seemed to serve so well its purpose—of exorcizing my "ghosts."

Am still under the spell of last night's star-gazing! The human animal, too, is an isolated unit. We, too, follow our lonely orbits without meeting or ever merging together. Each going his own gait. Each sealed hermetically apart, aloof, in his soft shell of flesh. Stumbling through life and disappearing. Men passing away every moment, new ones coming; a dingdong round. In the world someone born each second; sixty a minute. Try to picture it! More than three thousand new-born every hour; as many dead. Every year some thirty million people make way for thirty million new lives. Once a man really grasps it, lets these figures sink into his mind, how can he possibly feel an egocentric concern for his private fate?

*6 p.m.*—I float on wings today! Marvellously buoyant. A particle of living matter fully conscious of its *atomy.*

Recalled a thrilling conversation that took place one evening in Paris when Zellinger brought round his friend Jean Rostand to see me. It's a singular position man holds in this immense universe. And today I can perceive it quite as clearly as I did that night, listening to Rostand's cool, unemotional voice as he defined it with the cautious precision of the scientist and yet imparted to his summing up the lively imagery, the lyrical sweep of a poet. The nearness of death gives such thoughts a particular appeal for me just now. I handle them with reverence. Can it be that I have found in them an antidote for my distress?

Instinctively I fight shy of metaphysics and its castles in the air. Never did annihilation seem to me more certain. I envisage it with loathing, all my instincts are up in arms against it, but I do not feel the slightest temptation to take refuge in preposterous hopes.

Never before have I been so keenly aware of my insignificance… . Yet what a stupendous trifle! Standing back from myself, I contemplate that prodigious mass of molecules which for a brief while yet is "I" and watch, or pretend to watch, the secret processes which, for thirty years and more, have been going on incessantly within me, the activities of the billions of cells of which I am composed. All the mysterious chemical reactions and transformations of energy which are proceeding, unbeknown to me, in the grey matter of my brain and make me the thinking, writing animal I am at this moment. My will, my faculties of thought, all that "brainpower" of which I used to be so proud—what are all these but an interplay of reflexes independent of myself, a natural phenomenon and nothing more, and an unstable one at that, since a few minutes' cellular asphyxia will put a stop to it for ever?

*Evening*—Back in bed. Mentally alert, even a bit light-headed.

Still musing on Man and Life. Just now was struck with wonder, almost awe, at the thought of the vast organic lineage that lies behind me; the hundreds of thousands of centuries, all the successive forms of life that have gone into my making. And, at the origin of all—that inexplicable, perhaps accidental, chemical combination which took place aeons ago somewhere on the earth's charred and crumbling surface or in the depths of a steaming tropical sea, gave rise to the vital protoplasm, the basic stuff of life, and started off the process culminating in the strange, complex animal, endowed with consciousness and a capacity for abstract concepts such as the laws of reason and the ideal of justice, that is Man—a man like Descartes or Woodrow Wilson.

And then another idea crossed my mind, startling, yet plausible enough: that other forms of life capable of evolving into beings infinitely superior to man may have been destroyed at their inception by some cosmic cataclysm. In fact, when one comes to think of it, it seems almost miraculous that the chain of life, the last link of which is modern man, should have managed to persist unbroken through the ages up to our time, should have survived successfully the countless geological upheavals of the earth's crust, escaped the blind destructiveness of natural forces.

How long will this miracle continue? What ineluctable conclusion awaits our species in the days to come? Will it become extinct like the mastodons, the giant scorpions, the reptiles and sea-beasts of prehistoric ages? Or will the human race have better luck, survive all the catastrophic changes that may befall our planet, and go on progressing? Till when? Till the sun grows cold and life becomes impossible? And what new forward strides will our race have made before vanishing from the earth? One gets lost in such speculations.

But *what* new forward strides?

I cannot bring myself to believe in a cosmic plan in which the human animal plays a favoured part. I have come up against too many absurdities and inconsistencies in the scheme of things to admit the existence of an Immanent Will. No God has ever deigned to answer man's appeals or questionings. What he (man) takes for an answer is merely an echo of his own voice. His universe is self-contained, limited by his limitations. The most he can aspire to is to adapt this limited field of action as best he can to his requirements; it may seem to him an immense field compared with his own littleness, but it is small indeed in relation to the universe. Perhaps at last science will teach him to be satisfied with it, even to find his happiness, his peace of mind, in the awareness of his limitations. A not impossible feat; science is far from having said its last word, and it may even reconcile man with being the small and trivial thing he is, the product of one of nature's "accidents." It may lead him to feel permanently the great peace that has fallen on me tonight as I contemplate almost placidly the non-being which is to be mine so soon—into which all things ultimately lapse.

*August 23*—Just woke up after a longer, rather deeper sleep than usual. Feel rested. Would have little to complain of but for the secretions which clog my throat and make my breathing wheezy as a broken bellows!

Fell asleep in a sort of rapture; a desperate rapture, but grateful, none the less. All the gloomy thoughts that came back in full force this morning seemed then of no account; non-existence and my impending death were facts of a strictly natural order, against which there could be no question of rebelling. It wasn't exactly fatalism; rather a feeling of sharing, even as to disease and death, in the common lot of all things. What would I not give to recapture my last night's mood!

*Later*—On the veranda, before lunch. Conversations. Newspapers. The phonograph.

Fighting going on near Noyon and along the whole front between the Oise and the Aisne. More than two miles' advance in twenty-four hours. Lassigny occupied by us. The English have retaken Albert and Bray-sur-Somme. (It was at Bray, just behind the cure's house, that poor Delacour came to such a sordid, stupid end: hit by a stray bullet in the latrines.)

*Night*—Trying to regain my peace of mind. At dinnertime had a violent, very prolonged choking fit, which has left me utterly prostrated.

*August 26*—Almost constant pains at the back of my chest since yesterday morning. Last night they became unbearable. Accompanied by vomiting.

*August 27, 7 p.m.*—Have drunk a little milk. Joseph due to return presently, before leaving for the night. Am listening for his footsteps. Plenty of important things for him to do: tuck in the sheets, shake out the pillows, let down the mosquito-net, pour out my medicine, empty the spittoon, place within easy reach my glass of water, bottle of drops, the lamp-switch, and the push-button of my electric bell. "Good evening, sir." "Good evening, Joseph." Then a long wait. At 8:30 Hector, the night orde'rly, will look in. Never speaks. Just opens the door eight or ten inches and pokes his head in. As if to say: "I'm at my post. All's well. You've nothing to worry about!"

Then solitude; another interminable night beginning.

*Midnight*—Courage failing. Going to pieces mentally. All my thoughts hark back miserably to myself—i.e., my end. If I think of anyone I knew in the old days, promptly I catch myself reflecting: "Someone else who doesn't know I am dying" or: "I wonder what he'll say when he hears of my death."

*August 28*—Pain seems to be diminishing. Perhaps it will disappear as unaccountably as it set in. X-ray bad. Proliferation of the fibrous tissue developing more rapidly since the last examination. Especially in the right lung.

*August 29*—Definitely in less pain. But very exhausted after these four bad days.

War news. The latest offensive (between the Scarpe and the Vesle) seems to be going well. The English advancing on Noyon. We have occupied Bapaume.

*For Paul:*

Proud, that you will be. It's in our blood. Take yourself as you are, and be proud—deliberately. Humility, that parasitic "virtue," lowers a man. (And is, often as not, no more than a secret recognition of incompetence.) Neither vanity nor modesty. Know yourself strong, to be it.

Parasites, too, the blandishments of self-denial, the desire to abase oneself, to take orders; the smug satisfaction of obedience, the dread of freedom. Parasites that sap a man's vitality, reduce him to inertia. One should cultivate the virtues that uplift, and the greatest of these is—energy. For it is energy that makes the man.

And the price he pays for it is loneliness.

*August 30*—We have advanced beyond Noyon. What has it cost in lives?

Surprised that the press is allowed to go on saying that the end of the war is in sight. If America has taken the field, it is not with the object of a merely military victory or an army-made peace. Wilson's aim is to decapitate politically Germany and Austria, to wrest from them the tutelage of Russia. But even at the rate things are going it's surely overoptimistic to expect a breakdown of the Teutonic empires and the establishment of solidly republican governments, with which we can negotiate to good purpose in Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg within six months or so.

Half a dozen tightly stretched telegraph-wires score the rectangle of blue sky framed in my window, like scratches on a photographic plate. On rainy days an endless string of tiny drops of water slithers along each wire, all racing in the same direction, an inch or two apart, never catching up with one another. Impossible to look at anything else, to concentrate on anything else, when this is happening.

*September 1*—Another month beginning—shall I see the end of it?

Have started going downstairs again. Lunched in the mess.

Since I stopped shaving (in July) have had little occasion to look at myself in the mirror above my basin. Unexpectedly just now in the office I caught sight of my face. And all but failed to recognize that gaunt, bloodless, bearded face as mine. "A bit run down," Bardot conceded. "At death's door" would be nearer the mark. At best, only a few weeks more to go.

The English have retaken Mount Kemmel. We are attacking along the canal, the Germans falling back on the Lys.

*Night*—Thinking of Rachel. Why Rachel? Those long, drooping eyelashes that veiled her eyes in a sort of golden mist. Her gaze so full of ripe experience, the way she sometimes laid her hand upon my eyes to prevent my seeing the passion on her face. The firm pressure of her fingers that suddenly relaxed at the same instant as her lips and all the muscles of her body.

*September 2*—A slight breeze. Chose a place to leeward of the building. Behind me, on the veranda, I heard Goiran, Voisenet, and the company sergeant-major comparing notes about their student days in Paris. The Latin Quarter, its café and dance-halls, pretty ladies and the rest. Listened for a while, then withdrew to the lounge in a thoroughly bad temper. But curiously stirred as well.

Don't be afraid, my dear Paul, of wasting your time… . No, that isn't quite what I meant to say. Rather, be convinced that man's life is terribly short, that you have very little time before you to make the utmost of your possibilities.

But, all the same, I advise you to squander a little of your youth. Your Uncle Antoine, who is dying, cannot forgive himself for never having squandered an hour or two of his.

*September 3*—First glimmer of the dawn. I dreamt of you last night, Paul. I was sitting in the garden here and you stood beside me; I had my arm around you, pressing you to my side, and the life-force I felt surging in your sturdy little body brought to mind a young sapling thrusting up bravely toward the sun. And somehow you were at once the child I held on my knees some weeks ago, the growing lad I was, and the doctor I have become. On waking, for the first time this thought flashed through my mind: "Perhaps he'll be a doctor!"

I let my fancy play with the notion. And I've a mind to leave you some big bundles of notes, the record of ten years' clinical experience and research, and various projects I had hoped to carry out. If, when you are twenty, you personally have no use for them, please turn them over to some young doctor.

But no, I won't give up my dream so lightly; I see—this morning I insist on seeing—the young doctor who is to carry on where I left off as you, and not another.

*Noon*—I suspect that I was wrong to drop the re-education of my larynx and cut short my breathing-exercises. During the past couple of weeks I have been going steadily downhill and my condition this morning necessitated galvano-cautery treatment.

Spent the morning in bed.

Read Wilson's Labour Day message several times. It is at once idealistic and rich in common sense. Wilson repeats that a lasting peace must be something more than a mere readjustment of the balance of power in Europe. This war, he says unequivocally, is another "war of emancipation." We must not slip back into the old rut, but make a clean sweep of the follies of pre-war Europe, when peaceful, industrious peoples let themselves be ruined by armaments and spent their days guarding frontiers with fixed bayonets. The nations must unite in peace and amity. The end of the war must bring the Old World that sense of security which gives the U.S.A. its unique stability. The coming peace must not humiliate the vanquished, must leave no itch for revenge behind it, nothing that could foster a recrudescence of the war spirit.

Wilson lays down clearly the prime condition of such a peace. Autocratic governments must be destroyed. That is essential. There can be no security for Europe so long as German imperialism has not been uprooted. So long as the Austro-German bloc has not made a decisive move toward democracy. So long as we have not sterilized that hotbed of false ideals (false because inimical to the general welfare of mankind) which consists of a mystic faith in imperialism, the ruthless glorification of brute force, the Germans' claim that, being superior to all other races, they have a right to rule them (e.g., the Kaiser and his satellites who regard this as a holy war, and each German as a crusader whose mission it is to impose German hegemony on the world).

*Night*—Goiran and Voisenet dropped in after dinner. Very pleasant. Talked about Germany. Goiran maintained that the Germans' odious cult of violence is less a product of the imperial regime than an innate national and racial propensity, an instinct rather than an acquired character. The usual counterarguments. Germany isn't only Prussia, and so forth. Even Goiran had to admit that there exist in Germany the makings of a peaceful, liberal-minded nation. And even supposing that the German "evangelism" (as he called it) is a racial instinct, what then? Obviously an autocratic government fosters, develops, and exploits it. It depends on us (if we win this war), on the nature of the peace terms we impose and on our attitude to the defeated nation, whether this maleficent spirit is or is not to persist in post-war Germany. The schooling in democracy which Wilson desires the Germans to undergo should soon reduce its virulence or divert it into other channels. Provided, of course, that the peace treaty leaves no rankling grievance in the German mind. Fifteen years should see this "reformation" through. Am very hopeful, and pretty well convinced that after the year 1930 there will be a republican, patriarchal, industrious, peace-loving Germany—one of the most solid guarantees of a United Europe.

Voisenet reminded us of November 1911. Very properly. Why should the Franco-German agreement arranged by Caillaux have merely put back the war? Because it did not modify the German political system. Because the aims of Germany, Austria, and Russia continued being identical with those of their emperors, statesmen, and the military party. Wilson has grasped this. Merely to defeat the Kaiser will serve no purpose if we fail to break the domination of the Prussian spirit and put an end to its Pan-German ambitions, the lust for world conquest. Yes, the underlying causes must be extirpated if we are to feel sure that Prussianism will not rear its ugly head again. Only thus will lasting peace be ensured.

A fact to remember: it was the Kaiser's government, alone against the rest of Europe, that wrecked the Hague Conference. Goiran gave us details. An agreement had been reached for the limitation of armament's, a pact of which great things were expected had been drawn up. On the eve of its execution the German representative received orders from his government not to sign. That day the German Empire dropped the mask. If the principle of arbitration and the limitation of armaments had been accepted by Germany as by the other powers, the European position in 1914 would have been quite different and war most probably averted. Facts which we must not forget. So long as a government imbued with the doctrine of Pan-Germanism holds absolute sway over seventy million subjects whose national pride it deliberately keeps at boiling-point there can be no peace in Europe.

*September 4*—Very acute twinges of pain in the side, flitting from point to point—in addition to all the rest.

The communiqué announces the capture of Peronne. This is the first time, I believe, that we have been allowed to know we lost it during the August fighting.

A short letter from Philip. In Paris they are saying Foch intends to launch three simultaneous offensives: toward Saint-Quentin, along the Aisne, and, with the Americans, along the Meuse. As Philip says, "More 'bloodletting' in prospect." Is it really necessary that so many lives should be lost before the powers accept Wilson's "points"?

*Night*—Goiran looked in. Fuming with indignation. Described the argument at dinner regarding Wilson's latest message. Almost everyone held that the League of Nations should be, above all, an instrument for maintaining, after the war, a coalition of the whole civilized world against Germany and Austria. According to Goiran this opinion, which is already firmly rooted in the French official mind (from Poincaré and Clemenceau downward), may be summed up as follows: for the establishment of a durable peace in Europe it is a sine qua non that the Boches should be excluded from the League. They are a race apart, a blot on civilization, incurably war-minded. If they are given a free hand, good-bye to peace! Therefore, Germany must be kept down by every means, made incapable of aggression.

Horrible notions! If what Goiran says of the "official" view is correct, it is nothing short of a betrayal of Wilson's plan. To exclude peremptorily from a so-called Universal League a third of Europe, on the pretext that the nations thus excluded are responsible for the war and can never be trusted again, is tantamount to nipping in the bud the project for an international jurisprudence, to setting up a mere parody of a League of Nations, to confessing that our real war aim is to keep Europe under the Anglo-French hegemony, and to sowing broadcast the seeds of future wars.

Fortunately Wilson is too shrewd to fall into this nationalistic trap!

*September 5, Thursday*—Can hardly keep on my feet today. It took me five minutes to walk down the stairs, struggling like a drowning man against asphyxia.

Slowly but steadily going downhill. Last night remembered Father's death-agony. That nursery-song he kept on singing to himself, about the "pretty pony" and riding to the tryst:

Then clinkety and clankety
Along the lanes we go… .

(Must get down to writing those notes about Father which I want to leave to Paul.)

How often when I had a few days behind the lines in a rest-camp, and was revelling in the joys of a real bed to sleep in, did I lie and meditate for hours on the things I'd do once the war was over! The childish dreams I dreamt of the new life—more useful, more diligent—I was going to lead. "After the war"—the words seemed charged with magic.

Death. No "after the war" for me. The fixed idea returns. A foreign body lodged in my brain, a festering, malignant growth. Everything might be changed if I could reconcile myself to death. But, for that, I'd need to fall back on some metaphysical belief. Outside my range.

Curious that a mere relapse into non-existence should go so cruelly against the grain. Cannot help wondering how I'd feel if I believed in Hell and was sure of being doomed to eternal torments. … I doubt if even that could be much worse.

*Night*—The major has just sent up (by Joseph) a magazine with a marker in it. Opening it at the marked page, I read: "Wars have all sorts of pretexts, but only one cause—the army. Abolish armies and you abolish war. But how are armies to be abolished? By suppressing autocratic government." A quotation from one of Victor Hugo's speeches. Reymond has noted in the margin: "Peace Congress, 1869."

Well, he can ironize to his heart's content! But the fact that the suppression of autocratic regimes and the limitation of armaments were already mooted as far back as fifty years ago, is that a reason for abandoning hope that at long last men will learn wisdom?

Sputum more copious these last few days. The amount of debris has increased (sloughs of tracheal mucus and membranous casts).

*September 6*—Had a letter this morning from *Mme.* Roy. She writes to me every year on the anniversary of her son's death.

(Lubin often reminds me of young Manuel Roy.)

What would be Roy's attitude, were he alive today? I can picture him messed up (like Lubin), but game as ever, eager to recover quickly and go back to the front.

I often wonder, Paul, what will be your ideas about the war in the years to come—say, in 1940, when you are twenty-five. You will be living, no doubt, in a very different Europe, a Continent made safe for peace. Will you even be able to understand what was meant by "nationalism" or the fine enthusiasm of the young men who were your age, twenty-five, in 1914, and went to fight for their country, proud and glad to do so, as was Manuel Roy. He was a very lovable young man, Paul, and I hope you will not be unjust but try to understand. Make no mistake about the heroism of these youngsters; they had no wish to die, but France was in peril and they were quite prepared to lay their lives down for her. Not all of them were mere hotheads; many, like Manuel Roy, were ready to make that supreme sacrifice because they believed that by so doing they were ensuring for the rising generation (your generation, Paul) a better, happier future. There were many such, I can assure you. Your Uncle Antoine vouches for them.

War news good. We have crossed the Somme and reached Guiscard. Another advance, north of Soissons; Coucy recaptured. Will we be able to stop the Germans from digging themselves in behind the Escaut and the Saint-Quentin canal?

*September 7, night. For Paul*—Still thinking of the future. Your future. Those better, happier times to which young men like Manuel Roy looked forward. Happier? I hope so for your sake. But we are bequeathing to you a world that's sadly out of joint. I fear your start in life will take place in a period of great unrest, in a world of divided purposes, jarred by the clash of warring principles, the new and the old. Lungs of steel will be needed to cope with that polluted atmosphere, and a young man's life will be far from a bed of roses!

Usually I refrain from prophesying. But to glimpse the Europe of tomorrow needs no special foresight. Obviously all nations will be impoverished; social conditions everywhere in turmoil. Morally there will be a violent break with the past, and all the old standards will be scrapped. The world will pass through a phase of growing pains, with bouts of fever, convulsions, sudden improvements and relapses; and reach a new equilibrium in the end, but only after many, many years. It will be a hard birth, the birth of your New World.

And you, Paul, how will you fare in those tempestuous times? You will find it none too easy to form your own ideas, with everybody (as always in such periods) vaunting his pet world-saving nostrum, and imagining he has the Truth in his pocket! Goiran foresees an era of sheer anarchy. That I doubt. Or if there is a spell of anarchy, it will be on the surface only and will not last long. For the whole trend of human progress is in the other direction. All history vouches for it. Any permanent breakdown of civilization is unthinkable. Inevitably there will be setbacks, but the human race is bound to move toward greater and greater organization. In fact, this war will register most probably an emphatic forward stride, if not toward fraternity, at least toward a mutual understanding between nations. Wilson's peace will broaden the European outlook; notions of human fellowship, of civilization as a common heritage, will take the place of nationalism.

In any case, you will see tremendous changes in the shape of things. And what I wanted to say is this: it seems to me that in the days which are coming public opinion and the directive ideas behind it will have a much greater, indeed, a preponderant influence on world affairs. The future will be more malleable than was the past; the individual will carry much more weight. Under the new conditions a man of worth will have a far better chance of getting a hearing, winning acceptance of his views, and taking a share in the reconstruction of society.

To be a "man of worth"—that is the thing to aim at; to develop a personality that compels recognition, and to mistrust the ideologies of the moment. There is always such a temptation to shirk the strain of thinking for oneself, to let oneself be caught up in a great wave of collective enthusiasm, to embrace some comforting doctrine because it makes things easy. Will you be able to resist that temptation? You will find it none too simple. For it is precisely when his mind is most beset with doubts that a man is liable, in his desire to find an escape at all costs from perplexity, to clutch at any ready-made creed that offers reassurance. Any fairly plausible answer to the problems he has been brooding over, and cannot solve unaided, will strike him as a heavensent solution—especially if it bears the seeming guarantee of being endorsed by the majority. There, indeed, lies your greatest danger, and I advise you to turn a deaf ear to slogans of the day. Refuse to become a "party man"! Better endure the torments of uncertainty than enjoy the specious peace of mind that doctrinaires induce in their adherents. Granted that groping in the dark, alone, may be unpleasant, but it's the lesser evil. Beware of following blindly the false leads of others; nothing could be worse. In this respect, my dear Paul, your father's life may serve you as a model. In his independence, his refusal to pin his faith to any hide-bound creed, his isolation, you have a rare example of loyalty to oneself, of conscientiousness, of strength of mind and dignity.

Daybreak. Another sleepless night is ending.

(I detect a tendency to "preach" when I write for Paul's benefit. Must myself beware of using that word "Beware!"—and of imperatives in general!)

Writing to Paul about the "man of worth," I see I overlooked only one thing—the formula.

The "men of worth" I have come in contact with were mostly members of the medical profession. Still, I am inclined to think that the attitude of the good citizen toward events, when dealing with the realities and unforeseen contingencies of social life, must more or less parallel that of the doctor toward disease. The main thing is to bring an open mind to every situation. It is common knowledge that in medicine what one gets out of books rarely enables one to cope with the special problems presented by each individual case. Every illness—and, by the same token, every social crisis—presents itself as a new type of disorder without a precedent exactly tallying, as an exceptional case, in fact, for which a new method of treatment has to be devised. Much imagination goes into the making of a man of social worth.

*Sunday, September 8*—On waking this morning I coughed up a piece of tissue nearly four inches long. Gave it to Bardot for analysis.

Have reread what I wrote last night. Amazed at my ability now and then to take an interest in the future, in those who will come after me. Is it only for Paul's benefit? Thinking it over, I find this interest wholly spontaneous and less intermittent than I supposed. On the contrary, it is my surprise at feeling this interest which calls for mental effort, an act of conscious introspection. In reality, thinking of the future is second nature with me; I'm always doing it. Odd!

*Before lunch*—A conversation I had with Philip long ago—one of our first non-professional conversations, when I had just begun working under him—has come back to me. It related to an item in the morning's news which had caught his eye. A man about to be executed, as the executioner's assistants seized him and were placing his neck under the guillotine, had started struggling, turned and shouted to the warden: "Don't forget to send my letter!" He had learned, when in the death cell, that his mistress had taken another lover, and just before being led to execution had written to the public prosecutor, confessing to another crime which had gone undetected and in which the woman had played an active part.

Both of us were at a loss to understand how a man could, at the very last moment of his life, be so exclusively preoccupied with mundane matters. Philip saw in it a proof of the impossibility it is for most men to "visualize" their non-existence.

The story does not surprise me now so much as it did then.

*September 9*—A foul taste in my mouth. What's the use of this added infliction? Never had any faith in this new creosote preparation, which recalls the dentist's chair and spoils one's appetite.

*Afternoon, out of doors*—This morning, writing in the date, September 9, I suddenly remembered. Today is the second anniversary of "Reuville."

*Night*—Have spent the day thinking of that experience. We had reached Reuville on the previous evening and set up our first-aid station in the crypt of the village church. The place was in ruins, shelled out of recognition. A pitch-black night lit now and then by Very lights. The colonel (acting brigadier) had set up headquarters in what remained of a big house—three broken stumps of walls. Seventy-fives banging away in a wood close by. The edges of the pond strewn with fallen gables. A red eiderdown quilt lying in the street; I was to stop a bullet next day just beside it. Underfoot, mud and rubble, churned up by the wheels of battery-wagons. Looking out through the splintered windows of the crypt one saw, just beyond the village, a range of low hills, from which the wounded men came down in bunches, white with dust, hobbling along with that curious air of mild, resigned bewilderment they all had. I can still see the crestline of those hills etched black upon the flaming sky, fretted with barbed-wire posts all leaning over the same way as if a great gale had swept them… . On the left, a windmill lay spreadeagled on its wings, like a broken toy. (I take an odd pleasure in depicting this scene. I wonder why. To rescue it from oblivion? And for whom? Is it for Paul to know that one morning years ago at Reuville … something happened to his Uncle Antoine?) The crypt was crowded from nightfall on with wounded men, groaning and cursing. At the far end was a layer of straw on which they dumped the dead alongside the dying and severely wounded. A hurricane-lamp on the altar; candles stuck in bottles on the floor. On the vaulted roof our shadows danced a weird fandango. I seem to see once more the makeshift operating-table—some planks propped on two barrels—the piles of lint. I can see it all as clearly as if I'd had time to pause and contemplate it. As a matter of fact, I was frantically busy, buoyed up by the joy of feeling I was doing my job, and doing it well; in a state of feverish activity. The energy I had in those days! One had to act quickly, keeping one's wits about one all the time and nerves keyed up to their highest tension, till one seemed to feel the willpower tingling along one's arms to the fingertips. And with it all a sort of anguish, blunted, however, by an incapacity for feeling, a machinelike automatism. What kept a man going was the work in hand; he had to give his whole mind to it, shut his eyes and ears to everything else. Each essential gesture had to follow in due order, rapidly, without haste but without wasting a second, whether a wound had to be asepticized or an artery ligated, a fractured limb set. Then—"Next patient, please!"

I can visualize less clearly that shed or stable on the far side of the little street in which they laid the wounded brought in on stretchers. But I remember very well the street itself—one had to slither along it, hugging the walls—with bullets whizzing by and flaking off the plaster. And the furious expression of that little bearded major, with his right arm in a sling, flapping his unwounded hand in front of his face as if he were being pestered by a swarm of insects. "Too many damned flies about! Infernal nuisance!" And suddenly another bearded face rises before me—the rather sinister face of that elderly volunteer who was in our ambulance unit at Longpré—and I can hear his gruff voice as he shifted a wounded man off his stretcher: "Off ye go, lad! Doctor's orders!"

All that night we kept at it till we dropped, never suspecting that the Germans had worked their way round the village. At dawn a liaison officer rushed up, told us the enemy was on our flank, the covered sap by which we had come was now "unhealthy," and there was nothing to be done except to make a dash across the village square, which was being raked by machine-guns, and try to reach the nearest communication trench. Never had, even for a moment, the idea that I was risking my life. Falling, I had a glimpse of the red eiderdown, one last clear thought: "Lung punctured… . Heart intact. *I'll pull through!*'

Curious how things pan out! If that morning I'd been wounded in an arm or leg, I wouldn't be where I am now. The whiff of mustard gas I inhaled two years later wouldn't have had such disastrous effects if I'd had both lungs intact.

*September 10*—Since yesterday haunted by memories of the war.

Will set down for Pat benefit an episode in my war service, owing to which I was kept at the front much longer than most of my colleagues from the hospitals. It took place in the winter of 1915. I was still attached to my regiment, which was then up the line on the northern front. But a ro' ation-roll had been drawn up between the various battalion medical officers by virtue of which each of us took a short spell of duty, every fortnight or so, at a small casualty clearing station (twenty beds) some four miles behind the lines. On coming there one night I found eighteen men lying in a sort of cellar. All were running temperatures, some as high as 104°. By the light of a hand-lamp I examined them. No possible mistake; all had typhoid fever. Now typhoid cases were "forbidden" at the front; there was a standing order the gist of which was that we must never diagnose typhoid fever. I rang up my commanding officer at once and told him that my eighteen "patients" were suffering from gastrointestinal troubles of a paratyphoid nature. (I was careful to avoid using the word "typhoid" or its equivalent "enteric.") I also informed him that I was convinced that if these eighteen poor fellows were not evacuated forthwith they would die in the said cellar, and that, as a matter of conscience, I refused to take over the so-called

clearing hospital. Early on the following morning a car came to fetch me and I was put on the carpet at divisional headquarters. I stood my ground against the brass hats—and to such effect that they consented to having the men evacuated at once. But that brush with authority left a black mark on my service record, which held up my promotion till the day when I was wounded.

*Night*—Thinking over my relations with the other men here. A promiscuity which, on the face of it, recalls that of the front. Actually quite different. Here one rubs shoulders; nothing more. At the front the humblest cook's helper is a brother.

Thinking, too, of the men with whom I was intimate. Melancholy retrospect! Almost all killed, disabled, invalided out, or "missing." What's become of Carlier, Lambert, that nice fellow Dalin, and Huart and Mulaton? And funny little Nops? And the rest—how many of them will see the war through unscathed?

Am thinking of the war just now in a new way. Daniel talked to me at Maisons, I remember, of the war forging a unique bond of friendship between men. (But how brittle a bond, and forged at what a cost!) In a way he was right, however; war does bring out sentiments of compassion, of generosity and mutual affection. In the shadow of death, nothing subsists but certain primitive reactions, common to all. Officers, N.C.O.'s, and other ranks, all endure the same constraints, hardships, agonies of boredom, the same hopes and fears; often they share the same food and the same newspaper. There is less pettiness, less backbiting, less desire to put one over on the other fellow than in civil life. Each stands in such dire need of his neighbour; one comes to help and love him, so as to be helped and loved in return. Personal grudges and rivalries die out in the front line. Hatred, too. One doesn't hate even the Boche in the trenches opposite, a victim like oneself of the world-wide madness.

Another point: by the sheer force of things, wartime is a time of *meditation*. For the uneducated man as well as for the educated. A crude sort of meditation, but profound. Which, too, is more or less the same for everyone. Perhaps it is the constant peril of death that compels even the least contemplative to start thinking. (Hence this diary!) There's not one of the men in my battalion whom I didn't catch unawares, at some time or other, lost in thought. In that mood of rapt, remote meditation, the need for which came now and again and which one tried to conceal. The only corner of oneself one shut against the world. In the enforced depersonalization of army life, meditation was the last refuge of the personality.

What will the men who escape death in the war retain of all these musings? Very little, perhaps. In any case, a passionate desire to enjoy life in their own way and a loathing for sterile self-sacrifice, for high-sounding slogans, heroism. (Some, however, may regret the "virtues" of the front.)

*September 11*—The fragment I coughed up the other morning has been histologically identified. Not a false membrane but a mucous cast.

*Night*—As a matter of fact, I think almost as often of my past life as of my death. Am always harking back to the past. I rummage in it like a ragpicker exploring a garbage-can. And now and again fish up a scrap which I examine, pore upon, and weave interminable dreams about.

A man's life is such a little thing. I do not say this because my own has been cut short—it's true of every life. A platitude, of course! But how few, when they repeat such phrases as "a brief candle in the eternal night," realize what that really means. How few men feel the tragic truth behind such verbiage!

Impossible to rid one's mind wholly of the futile desire to find a "meaning" in life. Even I, reviewing my career, often catch myself wondering: What was the point of it?

It had no "point." None whatever. If we find it so hard to admit that obvious fact, the reason is simply that we have eighteen centuries of Christianity in our blood. But the more one thinks, the more one observes the outside world and one's own mind, the more apparent it becomes that life is pointless, "signifying nothing." Millions of beings take form on the earth's crust, live their little hour, procreate, and pass away, making room for other millions, which likewise in their turn will pass away. Their brief appearance has no significance; life no meaning. And nothing matters—except, perhaps, to get through this short lease of life with the minimum of suffering.

A fact which is neither so disheartening nor so fatal to activity as it might seem. The feeling of having made a clean sweep of all the illusions cherished by those who insist on finding a meaning in life has much to be said for it; it gives one a sense of power and freedom, and a marvellous serenity. And, if one knew how to take it, it might be a first-rate tonic for the mind.

A memory has just come to me of that playroom on the ground floor of the hospital annex which I walked through every day at lunchtime, on my way out. It was always full of children on all fours playing with building-blocks. Some were convalescent, others incurable cases; there were backward children, half-witted children, and some remarkably intelligent ones. A world in miniature. Humanity viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. Many contented themselves with shifting to and fro the blocks in front of them, turning them over and looking at the different sides. Others, whose wits were brighter, set out the blocks in rows, matching the colours, or arranged them in geometrical patterns. Bolder spirits amused themselves building rather tottery little houses. And now and then one saw an exceptionally inventive and ambitious child who had set himself a difficult task and succeeded after several vain attempts in building an obelisk, a foot-high pyramid, or a bridge. When playtime was over, all these edifices were knocked down; all that remained was a litter of blocks on the linoleum floor ready for the next day's play-hour.

A very apt illustration, in its small way, of human life. Each of us, with no other aim but play (whatsoever lofty pretexts he alleges to himself), assembles according to his fancy the elements which life provides—the many-coloured blocks he finds around him when he is born. The most gifted try to make of their lives a complicated edifice, a real work of art. One should try to be among the gifted, for it is they who get the most fun out of the game.

Chance supplies the blocks, which each of us assembles as best he can… . And is it really of much importance whether the pyramid or bridge he builds is a success?

*Night*—Sorry, Paul, to have written as I did today. If you read that entry it will revolt you. "An old man's ideas," you will say, or: "A dying man's." You will probably be right. There are other, less negative, answers to the question you are putting yourself: "To what end, and for the sake of what, should a man live and work and do his best?"

For the sake of the past and of the future. For your father's sake, and for your sons'. As a link in a chain, it is for you to ensure its continuity. To bequeath your heritage—transmit it bettered and increased.

Perhaps, when all is said and done, that is the "point" of life.

*September 12, forenoon*—Have never risen above mediocrity. With average capacities, suited to what life required of me. Average brains, plus a good memory and a knack of assimilating ideas. Character, too, mediocre. All the rest—camouflage.

*Afternoon*—Health and happiness are blinkers. Illness removes them. I am convinced that the most favourable condition for a sound knowledge of oneself (and of one's fellow-men) is to have been through an illness and recovered one's health. Half inclined to write: The man who "has never known a day's illness" is bound to be a fool.

No, I've been an average man, and nothing more. With no real culture; my stock of ideas was purely professional, restricted to my calling. The really great man does not abide by such restrictions. Great doctors, mathematicians, statesmen, do not confine themselves to medicine, mathematics, or politics. They have far-ranging minds and feel at home in other fields of knowledge.

*Night*—More about myself. Really, I am little more than a man who has had luck. I managed to hit on the career in which I was best fitted to make good. (This, however, proves a certain horse sense!) My intellect was not above the average; just shrewd enough to make the most of favourable conditions.

I was always blinded by pride. I persuaded myself that I owed everything to my brains and enterprise; that I had built up my career and *earned* the success that came to me. I regarded myself as a very fine fellow because I had managed to make others, less gifted than myself, consider me such. Window-dressing. And it took in even Philip!

But one cannot fool oneself, or others, all the time, and I suspect life had some bitter disillusionments in store for me.

I shall never have been more than "quite a good doctor"—one of the ruck.

*September 13*—Pink sputum this morning. 11 a.m. Waiting for Joseph to appear with the cupping-glasses.

This ugly little world I live in, this bedroom—how well, how sickening well, I know each detail of it! Not a nail, not a hole left by a drawn nail, not a scratch on the brick-red walls, on which my eyes have not rested thousands of times. And, stuck above the looking-glass, those eternal girls flaunting their silly legs at me! (Yet—who knows?—if one day I had them removed, I might miss them.)

All the days and days I have passed lying in this bed—I who was once so active!

Active! More than merely active. I made a fetish of activity—like the young nincompoop I was. No, I mustn't be too hard on my orgies of activity. All I've learned I owe to it; I was schooled by action, by the daily hand-to-hand tussle with realities. Even in this hellish war—if I managed to face it so efficiently, that was because at every moment it called for action.

*Afternoon*—Really, I was cut out to be a surgeon. I brought a surgeon's temperament to the exercise of my profession. To be a first-rate doctor one needs a gift for contemplation, which I lack.

*Night*—Still thinking of the "man of action" I used to be. With a certain severity. I can see now that there was an element of playacting in it all. A pose. More to impress myself than to impress others. (Or if not more, anyhow as much.)

My besetting weakness: a constant need for approbation. (If you knew, Paul, what that avowal cost me!)

Have repeatedly noticed that others had to be present for me to get the best out of myself. The sensation of being watched, appraised, admired, was a fillip to my energies; I felt capable of anything, sure of myself, and prepared to run any risks, with others looking on. (E.g., my conduct during the bombardment of Peronne, at the first-aid station in Montmirail, in the attack on the Brule wood, *etc.* In civil life, too, I was far shrewder in my diagnoses and bolder in prescribing treatments when I was giving my consultations at the hospital, under my colleagues' eyes, than when I was alone in my consulting-room at home, dealing with a private patient.)

I realize today that true moral strength is of a different order; it dispenses with onlookers. Not so in my case. Left alone on Crusoe's island, I should probably have killed myself. But Friday's coming would have roused me to feats of heroism.

*Night*—Develop your willpower, Paul. Nothing's impossible, if you can will it strongly enough.

*September 14*—A relapse. Retrosternal pains on top of all the others. Paroxysms of retching, for which I can't account. Impossible to keep anything down. Have to stay in bed today.

Goiran has brought some newspapers. In Switzerland they talk about Austro-Hungarian peace proposals; also of an underground revolutionary movement in Germany. Wonder if there's anything in it. Can it be that, thanks to Wilson's messages, democratic ideals are beginning to gain ground over there?

Authentic, anyhow, is the news of an American advance toward Saint-Mihiel. Meaning we are on the way to Briey and Metz. But soon we shall come up against the Hindenburg line, said to be impregnable.

*September 16*—A shade better. No more vomiting. But very weak after two days' fast.

Just read Clemenceau's reply to the Austrian peace move. It leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. The tone is that of a cavalry colonel—worse, a Pan-Germanist! So our recent successes in the field are already having their effect. No sooner does a nation fancy it is getting the upper hand than it unmasks ulterior motives—always of an imperialistic order. Wilson will have his work cut out holding his own against our statesmen, unless the Allied victory is exclusively

America's work. Here was a golden opportunity for the Entente to make a frank statement of their intentions. But no, our spokesmen preferred to bluff, to demand more than they expect to get, so as to make sure of squeezing the maximum out of the losers when peace is declared. As Goiran said, "A handful of successes, and already the Entente is flushed with victory."

*September 17*—They may say what they like, but such recurrent attacks of bronchopneumonia have always been regarded as a sign of smouldering bacterial infection.

*September 18*—Bardot gave me a thorough examination, followed by a consultation with Sègre. He diagnosed "marked dilatation of the right ventricle of the heart, with a low blood-pressure and cyanosis." I've been expecting this for weeks. Remembered the old adage: "When the lungs go wrong, support the heart."

Specialties of a medical orderly: never to be on tap when one needs him urgently, and to linger on and on when his presence is an infernal nuisance.

*September 19, night*—Life and death, spanned by the endless chain of germination. … A train of thoughts started this afternoon when Voisenet and I were studying a map of the Champagne front.

Suddenly a memory flashed up in my mind of that spot, somewhere to the northeast of Chalons, where we halted in the middle of a vast, white, arid plain for a hasty meal. (It was in June 1917, just after my transfer.) The soil had been ripped to pieces by successive bombardments—so thoroughly that not a blade of grass was sprouting. Yet the season was early summer, we were well behind the front line, and all the land around had been brought back under cultivation. Near where we halted, in the centre of the chalky waste, was a little green oasis. Going up to it, I found a German graveyard. Above the shallow graves hidden in the tall grass, over the young corpses, was a profusion of wild flowers and weeds, a cloud of butterflies.

Commonplace enough. And yet today the memory stirred emotions unfelt at the time. All evening I have been musing on the blind extravagance of nature, and so forth… . But without being able to give shape to my thoughts.

*September 20*—Progrèss on the Saint-Mihiel front. Successful advance toward the Hindenburg line. Successes in Italy. In Macedonia. Successes everywhere. And yet …

And yet I think of all the lives these victories have cost.

And of something else. How not feel alarm at the change that has come over the Allied press since the tide turned in our favour? Alarming, too, the peremptory way in which Balfour, Clemenceau, and Lansing have rejected the Austrian proposals. And, I suspect, forced Belgium to turn down Germany's.

A visit from Goiran. No, I can't believe the end of the war so near as he supposes. It will take us long months yet, perhaps years, to bring into being a German Republic and set solidly on its feet again the tottering Russian mammoth. And the more victorious we are, the less disposed we shall be to make a non-vindicative peace, the only lasting peace.

A futile, irritating discussion with Goiran about "progress." "So you don't believe in progress?" he remarked. Of course I believe in it. Only—it's a miserably slow process. Nothing much is to be hoped of man for thousands of years yet.

*September 21*—Lunched in the mess. Widely different as are their views, Lubin, Fabel, and Reymond resemble each other in one respect: all are equally impervious to argument. Voisenet once said of the major: "I shouldn't be surprised to learn that his brain-pan's empty and all the grey matter's run down into his spinal cord!"

*For Paul:*

No truth is more than a stepping-stone. I can recall the days when it was thought that antiseptics had solved every problem. "Kill the microbe!" was the order of the day. Since then we have discovered that, in killing the microbe, we killed living cells as well.

One should feel one's way ahead, not rush to conclusions. All paths in the long run prove to be blind alleys. (Instances of this are frequent in medical research. Have seen men of equal mental calibre and inspired by an equal zeal for truth, after a careful study of the same phenomena, come to different, often diametrically opposite, conclusions, based on identically the same data.)

The earlier in life one gives up hankering after certainties, the better.

*September 22*—The twinges in my side have become so acute that, once I have settled down anywhere, I dread making a move. Bardot spoke very highly of an ointment containing ethyl para-amino-benzoates. Have tried it. Quite ineffective.

*September 23*—My chest is so covered with scars that it's all they can do to find a new place on it for the cauterizer.

*September 25*—Yesterday I began to run a swinging temperature. Made an attempt to get downstairs, however. But I nearly fainted on the stairs; had to go back to bed.

How sick I am of this poky little room and these hideous walls! I keep my eyes shut, not to see them.

Thinking of pre-war days, my past life, my youth. The driving force of my career was a profound, unshakable belief in the future. No mere expectation, but real certainty. And now, where my guiding light was, all is gloom. A fog that never lifts; the Valley of the Shadow.

Nausea. Bardot had to stay downstairs attending to three new patients. So it was Mazet who came to see me twice this afternoon. His uncouth manners and ugly mug are more than I can stand just now. Reeking of sweat, as usual. My gorge rose.

*Thursday, September 26*—A bad night. They have discovered new patches of moist rales.

*Night*—The injection has given me slight relief. For how long?

A short visit from Goiran left me exhausted. Franco-American offensive, Anglo-Belgian offensive. Germans falling back all along the line. On the Balkan front, too, Allied successes. Bulgaria asking for an armistice. Goiran said: "Peace with Bulgaria is the beginning of the end—like the moment in a pregnancy when the 'pains' begin."

And inside Germany, too, trouble's brewing. The Socialists have stated the exact terms on which they are prepared to enter the Cabinet. That widespread discontent exists in Germany is obvious; there are frank allusions to it in the Chancellor's speech.

Things are going almost too well, events moving at a pace that makes one apprehensive. With Turkey crushed, Austria and Bulgaria on the verge of capitulating, with victories on every front, peace will take us unawares—a leap in the dark. For I doubt if Europe is ripe for a real peace.

At the Grand Hotel in Grasse an American has bet a thousand dollars to twenty francs that the war will be over before next Christmas.

Can't help envying those who have a next Christmas to look forward to!

*September 27*—Debility increasing. Dyspnoea. Since Monday, complete aphonia. Sègre came to see me at Bardot's request. Made a thorough examination. Less distant than usual. Worried about me?

*Night*—Sputum examination: pneumococci present, but still more streptococci, steadily multiplying in spite of the antistreptococcal serum; all the characteristics of infective complication.

Am to be X-rayed tomorrow morning.

*September 28*—Marked signs of general infection. Bardot and Mazet come to see me several times a day. Bardot has decided, after X-raying me, to do an exploratory puncture. What does he suspect? An abscess in the lung tissue?

*October 6*—A terrible week… .

Still not up to writing much. Half asleep. A mild pleasure in picking up this diary again, even in being back in this room, even in reviewing my chorus girls! The simple pleasures of the sick!

Another reprieve.

*October 7*—Strength gradually returning. My temperature has fallen back to normal in the mornings; ioo°-ioo.5° at night.

They all thought I was a goner. Wrong, this time!

On Monday, the 30th, was moved to the Grasse hospital. Mical operated on me in the afternoon. Sègre and Bardot present. A big abscess in the right lung. Well defined, luckily. Five days later was fit to be brought back here.

Why didn't I kill myself on the 29th, after the puncture? Never thought of it. (Literally true!)

*October 8, Tuesday*—Less weak today. I suppose I really ought to feel annoyed that they pulled me through. But I don't regret it. In fact, I welcome this new reprieve with a sneaking satisfaction!

The break in my reading of the papers has made them difficult to follow. For instance, I didn't know the German Cabinet had resigned. That there have been grave happenings over there is evident. According to the Swiss press, the new Chancellor has been appointed so as to facilitate peace negotiations.

*October 9*—Feeling rather humiliated. I never had the least inclination to kill myself, did not even think of it, till I was back in this room. Between the discovery of the abscess and the operation I had only one idea—that the operation should take place at the earliest moment … and succeed.

Still more humiliating. While in the hospital at Grasse, I never ceased regretting having left the amber necklace here. I even made a resolution to hand it over to Bardot as soon as I got back and extract a promise from him to place it in my coffin. Amazing!

Doubtful now if I shall do this. A dying man's whim—mere silliness! Yet, my dear Paul, if I yield to this caprice, please don't be in too much of a hurry to write your uncle down as a sentimental fool. The associations of this necklace may concern a paltry love-affair, but, when all is said and done, that paltry love-affair was about the best thing in my paltry life!

*October 10*—A visit from Mical.

*October 11, Friday*—The surgeon's visit yesterday exhausted me. He gave me full details. It was a large abscess, well walled off by a network of tough fibrous tissue. Thick pus, of the consistency of cream. Had to admit there was marked pulmonary congestion. Bacteriological examination gives cultures of streptococci.

Mical was interested by my case; such cases are relatively rare. In seventy-nine mustard-gas casualties treated in the last year there were only seven cases of *simple* abscess (mine included). Four were successfully operated on. As for the other three …

Still rarer, happily, are cases of *multiple* abscesses. Never operable. There were only three such cases; all fatal.

So I'm in luck. … I wrote that without thinking; had I stopped to think, I would certainly have refrained from talking of my "luck." Still, now it's written, let it stand. Obviously I'm not yet sufficiently indifferent to life to describe a prolongation of my sufferings as bad luck.

*October 12*—Started getting up again yesterday. My weight has gone down still more. Lost five pounds since September 20.

Heart still flagging. Digitalis and drosera twice a day. Profuse sweats. Feverishness, sudden loss of strength, a dry cough, fits of choking—all simultaneously. And whenever someone asks me these days how I am getting on, I reply: "Not too badly!"

*October 13*—The Swiss papers report, plausibly enough, that the new German government is approaching Wilson by indirect channels with a view to opening negotiations. They even say that a request for an armistice has been actually made. This is borne out by the Chancellor's latest speech before the Reichstag; it contains a frank proposal of peace. What a change from the German arrogance of only yesterday!

Let's hope the Allies keep their heads and resist the temptation of overdoing their triumph. Already, everywhere, they are crowing like a jockey who has just won the Derby at long odds. Even Rumelles, I expect, has quite forgotten that last spring he was prepared for the worst; today, most likely, none of our conquering heroes is more intransigent than he.

Scandalous, the way that word "joy" crops up persistently in the French papers; our feeling should be one of deliverance, not of joy. How can they forget so soon the load of distress that weighs on

Europe? Nothing, not even the end of the war, can alter the fact that grief, not joy, is paramount today and will remain so for years to come.

*October 14, night*—Insomnia again. I find myself regretting the lethargy I felt during my relapse. My mind is empty. I am helpless, at the mercy of my "ghosts." Just conscious enough to suffer *thoroughly*.

Had intended to make this diary a portrait of the man I was. For Paul. But even when I began it my power of concentration, ordering my thoughts, was on the downgrade… . Another hope gone west.

What does it matter? Every day I feel more indifferent, more aloof from everything.

*October 15*—The "big push" is progressing. Successes all along the line. It looks as if the fact that peace-talks have begun has spurred our High Command to force the pace and make the most of their last opportunity. The final round.

Feeling a little better today. In the mood for writing.

Voisenet dropped in. His flat face, eyes set wide apart in shallow sockets, and the thick, sleek eyelids like the petals of certain fleshy flowers (e.g., magnolias, camellias), remind one of the Buddha's face in Chinese busts. A large mouth; full, sluggish lips. A face of ancient wisdom, restful to contemplate, stamped with a placid, thoroughly Far Eastern fatalism.

He claims to have inside information as to the state of mind prevailing in military circles. What he says is alarming. Now that they feel they can draw indefinitely on the American reserve of manpower (said to be "inexhaustible"), losses have ceased to count. And there's an undercurrent of hostility to an early peace. The idea is to reject all proposals for an armistice, to invade Germany, and conclude peace in Berlin. And so forth. As Voisenet says, "Victory, not the end of the war, is all they think about." They are becoming more and more antagonistic to Wilson. Already declaring that the Fourteen Points represent only Wilson's personal views and have never been endorsed officially by the Entente. Voisenet pointed out, too, that since July (when the tide turned in our favour) the press, controlled of course by the censorship, has entirely ceased to speak of a "United States of Europe," though it still occasionally refers to a League of Nations.

*Night*—Voisenet left with me some copies of the *Humanité*. Struck by the sorry figure cut by our Socialists—when one has read and appreciated the American messages. Their tone is that of narrow party men. Nothing really fine can come of such ideas, or of people professing them; these Socialist demagogues are survivals from the pre-war age, and must be swept away like so much other refuse.

Socialism. Democracy. I can't help wondering if Philip was not right; the victorious governments may well refuse to give up the virtual dictatorship they have been exercising during the last four years. That republican brand of imperialism for which Clemenceau stands will, I suspect, die hard! Perhaps it is in conquered Germany that the true, the coming, socialism will strike root first. Precisely because it's a defeated country.

*October 16*—Have felt somewhat better during the past week.

Goiran has procured for me the report of Wilson's last message. While adding little to the previous ones, it defines his peace aims more explicitly. It announces that the war has paved the way for a "new order," an association of all nations—the only guarantee of collective security. When I consider the effect such words produce on a man at death's door like myself, I can picture what they must mean for the millions of combatants, for their wives and families. Impossible that such hopes should be raised in vain! Whether or not the Allied leaders are sincere in their adherence to Wilson's "Points" hardly matters now; things have reached a stage where the pressure of public opinion will make it impossible, when the hour strikes, for any European politician to withhold the peace that all desire.

I am thinking of Paul. Of you, my dear Paul. With infinite relief. A new world is coming to birth. You will witness its consolidation and play a part in it. Steel your resolve, to play a *worthy* part.

*October 17, Thursday*—A stern response from Wilson to the first German advances. He insists that, before any proposals can be entertained, the imperialist regime must be abolished, the military caste excluded from power, and a democratic system instituted. Obviously this may delay the coming of peace. Still, he was fully justified in taking a firm line. We must not lose sight of our essential aims. What we are after is not a peace at any price, or even a capitulation by the Kaiser. Our aim is general disarmament and European federation. Neither is feasible unless *imperial* Germany and Austria cease to exist.

Goiran much chagrined. I stood up for Wilson against him and the others; compared W. to a doctor who knows his job and drains an abscess before putting on the dressing.

Talking of abscesses—my big friend Bardot made it very clear that an abscess of the lung is never a *direct* result of gassing by mustard-gas vapour. The abscess is always caused by secondary bacterial infections, for which, however, the lesions following exposure to the gas have paved the way.

*October 18*—Have the greatest difficulty today in overcoming my fatigue. Not up to reading anything except the papers.

Incredible, the tone they take, gloating over our "famous victories"! Like Hugo romanticizing the Napoleonic saga! There's nothing epic, no heroic glamour, about this war (or any war, for that matter). It has been a brutal, sickening business and is ending, like a nightmare, in a cold sweat of remembered dread. Whatever deeds of heroism it called forth were submerged in horror. In the shambles of the trenches, in blood and filth. Men fought with the courage of despair. With the loathing men feel when a dirty job has been assigned them and they have to see it through. It will leave none but odious memories. All the pageantry of war—its bugle-calls, parades, saluting of the colours, and so forth—cannot redeem its beastliness.

*October 21*—Two bad days. Last night had an intertracheal injection of niaouli. Fibrosis and hyperesthesia of the larynx made the injection a tricky business; it was all the three of them could do to manage it. I saw beads of perspiration standing out on poor Bardot's forehead. But I had fully three hours' sleep and feel some relief today.

*October 22, Wednesday*—The new dosage of digitalis seems more effective. I notice that, when my voice is not completely gone, I stammer more than usual. Formerly I rarely stammered, and only in moments of great mental stress. Now, I suppose, it is merely a symptom of physical decay.

Read the papers. The Belgians are at Ostende and Bruges; the British at Lille, Douai, Roubaix, and Tourcoing. The whole front is going forward and nothing can stop it. But the exchange of notes between Germany and America is a desperately slow business. Yet it seemed that Wilson's preliminary conditions, a reform of the imperial constitution and the adoption of universal suffrage, had been accepted. That, if true, would be a great step forward. The next step is the Kaiser's abdication. Will that come at once, or only in six months' time? The press makes much of Germany's domestic troubles. No use hoodwinking ourselves, however; a revolution in

Germany might speed things up, but it would lead to complications. For Wilson seems determined not to treat with any but a stable government.

*October 24*—No, I don't envy the ordinary patient his ignorance, his wishful illusions. Much nonsense has been talked about the "cruel lucidity" of the doctor watching himself die. On the contrary, I believe that this lucidity has kept me going so far, and will, perhaps, help me through the last phase. Knowledge is no handicap, but a source of strength. I know. I know what's going on inside me. I can see my lesions. They interest me. I watch Bardot trying out his treatments. And up to a point this interest in my state is a great standby.

Wish I could analyse this matter to more effect. I'd like to write to Philip about it.

*Night*—Had a fairish day. (Have no longer the right to be exacting.) To lay my "ghosts," I fall back on this diary.

It is 3 a.m. I have spent the long sleepless hours pondering on all that each man's death consigns irrevocably to oblivion. At first I let this idea fill me with despair—I took its truth for granted. I was mistaken. Death consigns little, almost nothing, to oblivion.

Applied myself to delving in my memory. Recalled all sorts of strictly personal details: mistakes I'd made, little shabby things I'd done, affairs with women. Regarding each I asked myself: "Will it be blotted out of existence along with me? Has it really left no trace whatever, except in my own life?" For the best part of an hour I struggled to recall some incident of my past, some out-of-the-way act, of which I could feel sure that absolutely nothing had survived outside my own awareness—not the slightest aftereffect, no moral or material consequence, no seed of thought that might strike root eventually in another's mind. And there was not one incident in my life of which I did not wind up by discovering that some witness might conceivably exist, someone who knew about the matter or might have had an inkling of it—someone who, perhaps, was still alive and, after my death, might by some fluke of memory be led to recall it. I turned my head on my pillow this side and that, racked by a preposterous regret, a sense of mortification, for it seemed to me that, if I failed to discover something of the sort, my death would be a fiasco, I should not have even the small solace (for my pride) of taking with me into not-being something exclusively, uniquely mine.

Suddenly I hit on it! That incident at the Laennec Hospital; the little Arab girl.

So at last I have a memory which I know for certain is shared with no one on earth. Of which nothing, absolutely nothing, will survive the moment I have ceased to breathe.

Daybreak. Utterly worn out, but still unable to sleep. The moment I doze off, a fit of coughing rouses me.

Wrestled all night long with that phantom of the past. Torn between the temptation of recording my "confession" in this diary so as to preserve from extinction that rather squalid incident and, on the other hand, the jealous desire to keep it to myself and have this one small secret to take with me to the grave.

No, I shall write nothing… .

*October 25, noon*—Is it delirium setting in, or merely nervous exhaustion? Since last night I can think of my death only in terms of my "secret." Death, in fact, has come to mean for me the passing of that memory from the world. (Joseph looked in to talk about the prospects of peace. "Seems we'll be demobilized soon." "Soon, Joseph," I replied, "I shall be dead." Inwardly I thought: "Soon *nothing* will survive of that business with the little Arab girl.")

It's as if all of a sudden I had become master of my fate. Thanks to my "secret," I now have the whip-hand over death, since it depends on me, on a note I choose to write or a remark I choose to drop, whether that secret is or is not saved from oblivion.

*Afternoon*—When Goiran was here just now, could not refrain from alluding to it. Gave nothing definite away, of course. Did not even mention the Arab girl or the name of the hospital. Just like a child who's bursting with a secret. "I know something, but I won't tell!" Goiran gave me a queer, rather startled look. Must have wondered if my brain was going. But I, for the last time most likely, felt a tremendous thrill of pride.

*Night*—Tried to rest my mind by reading the papers. In Germany, too, the military clique is intriguing against peace. It seems that Ludendorff is at the head of a movement against the Chancellor, whom he charges with treachery for having proposed negotiations with America. But the forces working for peace have prevailed. And Ludendorff has been compelled to resign his post of Commander-in-Chief. A healthy sign.

Balfour's latest speech rather perturbing; the British are beginning to "ask for more," and there's talk of annexing the German colonies. Goiran reminded me that only last year Lord Robert Cecil, speaking in the House, reiterated that it was with no idea of territorial expansion the British had gone into the war. (They'll not go out of it, I fear, as they came in.)

Fortunately there's Wilson to be reckoned with. A champion of the right of self-determination for all nations. I trust he will not let the victors parcel out the black races like so much livestock.

Goiran very strong on the colonial problem. Showed very clearly what a shocking blunder the Allies would be making if they yielded to the temptation of annexing the German colonies. This is a unique opportunity for reviewing the whole question of colonization. Under the auspices of the League all the resources of the world should now be pooled for the common use. The surest guarantee of peace.

*October 26*—A sudden turn for the worse. Stifling fits all day.

*October 27*—My choking fits tend to take a new form—spasmodic and extremely painful. My larynx gets stenosed, as if it were gripped in a clenched fist. I have a feeling of being slowly strangled.

Spent nearly an hour recording in my case-history the progress of the disease. Doubt if I shall be able to keep up the case-history much longer.

*October 28*—Young Marius has just brought up the newspapers. The sight of his pink cheeks, bright eyes, the "panoply of youth" —his marvellous *unconcern* about his health—had a most distressing effect on me. Nowadays would rather see old men and invalids only. Can well understand a prisoner condemned to death flinging himself on the guard and strangling him, just to rid his eyes of the man's blatant freedom.

The physical machine is breaking down more and more quickly. Can't believe my mind is going the same way, but perhaps already it is too enfeebled to realize what is happening to it.

*October 29*—Would I find these self-communings less painful if I had what novelists would call a "great love" to look back on? I still think about Rachel. Quite often. But from a sick man's self-centred viewpoint. I tell myself it would be wonderful to have her here and die in her arms.

What a thrill I felt when I found her necklace in my room in Paris, and how I longed for her! … But that's all over now.

Did I "love" her? Nobody else, in any case. No other woman more, and none as much. But whether I was what they call "in love" with her I've no idea.

*Night*—For two days now digitalis has taken no effect. Bardot is coming presently to try an injection of camphorated ether.

*October 30*—Visitors. Active, busy people. What has life in store for them? Very likely it is I who am the lucky one!

Tired. Sick and tired of everything. So tired that my one wish is for it all to be ended.

I could see I startled them. Obviously I have changed a lot during these last few days. Sinking rapidly. I must have the face of an asphyxiated man, the staring, horror-stricken eyes; I know what that looks like—nothing could be ghastlier.

*October 31*—The chaplain let me know he wanted to visit me. He came on Saturday, but I was in too much pain to see him. Let him have his way today. Very boring. He started in about my "Christian upbringing," *etc.* I said: "Not my fault if I was born with an itch for understanding and an incapacity for believing." Wanted to bring me some "good books." I said to him: "Tell me: why don't the churches make a stand against war? Why do your French and German bishops bless the flags, and sing Te Deums to thank God for a bloody butchery?" To which he made the amazing (but orthodox) rejoinder: "A *just* war removes the Christian ban on murder."

A studiously cordial conversation, however. But he couldn't hit on an angle from which to tackle me. Said to me as he went out: "Oh, come now! Surely a man of your calibre can't admit that he will perish—like a dog!" I replied: "What can I do about it if I'm an unbeliever—like a dog?" He stopped at the door and threw a curious look at me; a mixture of severity, surprise, and sadness, with (it seemed to me) a hint of affection. "Why malign yourself, my son?" I don't think he'll come again.

*Night*—Could bring myself to do it if I thought it would give anyone pleasure. But nobody that I can see would be the happier if I pretended to die a Christian death.

Austria is asking Italy for an armistice. (Goiran has just come in with the news.) Hungary's proclaimed her independence, and a republic. Peace at last?

*November 1, morning*—The month of my death. Loss of hope is worse than the pangs of thirst. In spite of all, life still throbs within me. So strongly that sometimes I forget. For a while I am the man I was, that others are, and start—of all things—making plans! But then an icy wind sweeps down on me, and again I know.

Mazet comes to see me less often: a bad sign. And when he comes, he talks on every subject except (as far as possible) myself.

Am I going to regret old Mazet with his air of a prison-guard and his thick, square head?

Night—Hardly believable that, beyond the threshold of this room, the world of living men continues. How utterly remote from it I feel already! No living man could realize that isolation.

*November 2*—Have ceased getting up. For the last three days have not taken even the three steps between my bed and the armchair.

Never again. Never again shall I sit at that window. Or any window. Never again see those tall cypresses posted like sentinels against the evening sky… . Can it be true—that I shall never again see that garden, or any garden?

I write "never again," but catch only faint glimpses of the horror of great darkness behind those words.

*Night*—How will death come? How many times a night and for how many nights have I been asking myself that question! There are so many possible ways. A sudden, sharp laryngeal spasm, as was the case with young Neidhart. Or a gradually increasing one as in Silbert's case. Or will it be cardiac failure and syncope—the end of Monvielle and Poiret?

*November 3, morning*—The worst form of death was poor Troyat's: asphyxia. A ghastly end! I shall not wait for it.

*Evening*—Felt so ill this afternoon that I sent for Bardot twice. He is coming back toward midnight. Absent-minded. Left his tracheotomy set on my table.

They say: "Death is nothing; it's dying that hurts." I have the means of cutting it short; why do I go on suffering, putting it off? Yet I *do* go on—incorrigibly!

*November 4*—Armistice signed between Italy and Austria-Hungary.

The chaplain has tried to see me again. Had him told I was too weak to see him. But it's a warning; high time to make the plunge.

*November 5*—All that I hoped to do, all I should have liked to do, all I have failed to do—you, my dear Paul, must do for me some day.

*November 6*—An armistice any moment now, Goiran says. Yet on all fronts there's fighting going on. Why?

Complete aphonia; unable to utter a word.

*November 7*—The vocal cords have almost ceased to move. Paralysis of the arytenoids setting in? Bardot reticent.

Morphine.

*November 8*—German plenipotentiaries have crossed our lines. The end. Anyhow, have lived to see it.

*November 9*—Sharp turn for the worse. Swinging temperature again. (99° to 103.8°.) The pulmonary congestion has come back; no new symptoms, but a general recrudescence.

Asked them (Why? I wonder) to take another X-ray, and find out if there is a new septic focus. Afraid another abscess is forming. This fluctuating temperature is a sure sign of deep-seated suppuration.

*November 10*—Right lung more and more painful. Morphine all the day, orally. Bardot doesn't think there's a new abscess. No pathognomonic symptom.

Sputum rather less copious.

Revolution in Berlin. The Kaiser gone. In the lines everywhere men are full of hope, breathing again. And I …!

*November 11*—A horrible day. Intense burning pains at certain points, always the same, on my right side.

Why didn't I do it sooner, before my strength failed? And now—what am I waiting for? Each time I tell myself: "The moment has come," I … No. Not true. Never yet thought "has come." Only "is near." So I wait on… .

*November 12*—Bardot detects an area of consolidation surrounded by a zone of localized (?) moist rales.

*Noon*—X-ray shows semi-opaque area, without precise limits, at the right apex. Diaphragm does not move. Generalized diminution of translucency, increase of lung stroma, but no detectable abscess. If another abscess had formed, there would be complete opacity in the affected area, with a sharply defined edge. What can it be, then? The signs are still too vague to justify an exploratory puncture. If it's not another abscess forming, what can be the explanation?

*November 13*—Bouts of highly localized oedema persistently recurring at the same points. Obviously the infection is becoming generalized. Profuse, pungent sweats.

*Night*—Can it be a patch of miliary abscesses—widely distributed? Multiple abscesses? (Bardot must have considered this possibility.) In that case, nothing can be done; the abscesses being scattered through the lung tissue, no operation is possible, and asphyxia will bring the end.

*November 14*—Burning pains in both sides. The left lung, too, is now oedematous; the abscesses must be spreading through both lungs. As a last chance will they try inducing a fixation abscess?

*Night*—In the depths of discouragement, utter indifference. A letter from Jenny and one from Gise have been lying in my drawer since yesterday. Another from Jenny came this evening. All unopened. Leave me alone. Nothing left for anyone.

Keep on repeating to myself words I now comprehend for the first time: *De profundis clamavi.*

*November 15*—Perhaps was wrong to dread it so much; may not be so terrible as I thought. Perhaps the worst is over. Have figured out the end so often; too weak now for that. But everything's ready, within arm's reach.

*November 16*—Nothing came of the fixation abscess. Did they really try it or only pretend?

Written nothing in the case-history for two days. Too much pain.

Must decide *when*. Hard to tell oneself "Tomorrow" or "This evening."

*November 17*—Morphine. Solitude, silence. Hourly more aloof, cut off from everything. Can still hear them talking, but listen no longer. Almost impossible now to cough up the necrotic tissue.

How will it come? Would like to keep my head clear.and go on writing, up to the last moment.

Not resignation. Indifference. Exhaustion crushing out revolt. What must be, must. Surrender to pain.

Peace.

Have done with it… .

*November 18*—(Oedema spreading to the legs. High time—or my strength may fail. All's ready; I need only steel my will, reach for the syringe.

Struggled all last night.

High time.

*Monday, November 18, 1918.*

37 years, 4 months, 9 days.

Simpler than one thinks.

Good-bye, Paul.